Locked Out of Heaven

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Locked Out of Heaven

by Ilikesugarinmytea, MostArdentlyYours

Summary

The slightest of smiles touches Hannibal's lips, more of a twitch of the lips than anything. The people around him would very much fall apart without him, their personalities and very sanity slowly fragmenting without his careful yet firm hand to guide them along his path. Like the hand of a god, benevolent and violent, equal and indiscriminate.
They are loyal to a fault and not by any machinations on his part. They have, all in their own way, seen the light and blood of The Path, its trials and tribulations and in the end, it all led to him.

Notes

MostArdentlyYours and I are alternating between chapters and we would love to know what you think!

Chapter 1

There are pigs in his garden. The air is filled with their stink and distorted by their screaming laughter. His garden, filled with roses, blossoms, and the sweetest bounties of nature, has been defiled by their presence. Their disgusting familiarity with his home no longer surprises him. Where they have been once they assume they are welcome forever. But neither does their blind trust. It is not the fine wine and sweet champagne that dulls their senses. The Damascus rose and baby's breath does not lull them into a dream world of false security. His food in their bellies does not slow them down.

They are prey animals. Pure and simple. Sheep and pigs bred so greatly into complacency and submission that they cannot identify a predator in their midst. He was the Hunter among Sheep, the Devil's Ram among these penitent God fearing Humans, otherworldly and predatory. And they welcomed him with open arms and enthusiastically bared their necks to his sharpened teeth. Hannibal circulated among his guests like any good host. He smiled a human smile and spoke soft, ineffective human words that warmed their piggish hearts and tiny animal souls. How it fascinated him that none of them feared for the lives or knew how close they were to death. How hungry he could be. The many mouths that he had to feed.

Hannibal says his piece, he entertains his guest and begins to lose himself in their scent, sanguine, earthy, and satisfying. Darion as always appears when he is hungry. He appears before Hannibal can begin to salivate over prey for his plate or for his bed. Darion, however, does not seamlessly flow into the conversation Hannibal his having. He does not seamlessly flow or gracefully step into anything. The boy stumbles over his words and his feet like a puppy with ears too big for its head and paws for it to walk with. He is the pup that will become the hunting hound. He has not yet grown into rigid discipline and the strength of unrelenting, vicious jaws.

The touch at his elbow pulls Hannibal's attention away from the women in front of him, interesting, delicious bodies, and smiles with practiced, genuine sweetness. Darion exchanges polite words with the two women. He blushes when they compliment him and stutters when they coo. There is no one that Hannibal has encountered unable to resist Darion's accidental charm in person. Where Hannibal has always been a King, commanding attention and bestowing favor in his court, Darion was a prince. Shy, hesitant to speak and hesitant in bestowing his favor. It made him all the more desirable and hannibal often had to fend off unwanted, starstruck suitors with varying degrees of force.

Darion looked to Hannibal with deep, dark chocolate eyes. They glittered in the low evening light as if covered by a veil of grieving tears or the beginnings of white-hot rage. But his lips, strong and well-formed, curled up in a slight, shy smile.

"Tėvas," Hannibal wants to chide him for the state of his clothing, rumpled with activity and the excitement of the night. But he cannot bring himself to say a word against the honest sincerity that wraps itself around Darion like a second skin and prelapsarian excitement oozes

from his fine pores. Perhaps, Hannibal thinks, it was not best to have Darion out, excited as he is to be in the presence of Baltimore's high society. Like the childish state he is growing out of, Darion loves shiny baubles and surface deep beauty.

"Sūnus." Hannibal replies and Darion's face lights up. The sound of Hannibal's mother tongue excites the boy and makes him the all the more eager to learn Lithuanian. "Is there something wrong, my child?"

"Not at all, father," He says, his smile widening from some sort of strange elation. "There's someone here to see you."

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Darion leads him through his piggish garden party to the confines of their home. As Hannibal is lead to his office, there is no mistaking that he has been followed. Not hunted but obediently followed. As he waits for them to arrive, only a small portion of his inner circle attend him tonight, Hannibal cannot help the smile that comes to his lips. Perhaps it is Darion's excited energy, infectious by proximity or something entirely different, but it is that slight smile that he greets these familiar faces.

To other eyes, this might seem like a meeting of friends or colleagues. One that would splinter fantastically and the slight affection felt for others would be thrown to the wind, dissipating like smoke. These people were not his friends. They were not his acquaintances. They were his tools, his most devout disciples, his first-born children; broken down and rebuilt in ways that suited his purpose and goals. They had no chance of surviving in the world without him, their personalities and very sanity would fragment and shatter without his careful yet firm hand to guide them. He, in a way, was their father and creator, was their God. He could be loving or wrathful, jealous or forgiving. But they all lived and, if need be, died by his benevolent, violent, and indiscriminate hand.

Analise, his first daughter, his first most supplicant, was the first to enter. Slim and classically beautiful, her cheeks are flushed with wine and sanguine excitement. Leola follows her, his hunter, his lovely Artemis. There is a deadly grace in the liquid smooth movement of her limbs. Her eyes, dark magnetic pools of near black, carried a constant raging, hunger that he has felt his entire life.

They are completely his. His loyal, loving daughters. It's no force on his part that keeps them attached to his hip, or his rib like Eve to Adam. The Gently Lit Path, with its constant darkness and feeble light, its consecration of fallen blood that led them to him.

"There's a man here." Darion whispers and his eyes are bright with curious excitement and he cannot help but lower his voice. "He's from the F.B.I. and wants to talk to you about something."

"A special agent." Analise supplies to spare them all Darion's panicked rambling with a soft smile. "A department head."

"That is curious." He says, looking every one of them in the eye. "I doubt that this Special agent has come to us regarding our recent extracurricular activities." A soft chuckle of

amusement rises from them. “Even so I would recommend that we all stay calm and spread the word throughout the ranks to remain subdued and...refrain for the time being. I should go to him, but I would like for all of you to return to the guests and Analise,” she looks at him with a tilt of her head and a glint in her eye, “please watch over the food for the time being.”

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Special Agent Jack Crawford was a moderately interesting man. He was built strongly and in, Hannibal assumed, his forties. Grey was just beginning to speckle his hairline, like snow on his closely shorn black hair. He held himself proudly and like most law men seemed to throw himself around without moving. It was as if the righteousness of the law was prodding him upright and holding him there. Hannibal watched him, from behind his desk, as the man looked around his home office.

He had most definitely not invited the man to the party despite the giddiness he had felt at the original thought. Those closest to him, like his dear Margot had in her words ‘talked sense’ into him and guided him away from a supposedly ‘disastrous decision’. There was, curiously, something like anger that surrounded Jack Crawford. Something just and fervent and consuming lying just beneath the other man’s skin. It seemed to rise from his pores and mixed with the smell of sickness that lingered on the other man’s clothes. A sickness that was not own and - it seemed - terminal. Hannibal watched him move through his room, stalking invisible prey, as he turned that information in his head and decided what he would do with it.

“Are these yours Doctor?” Crawford asks, finally stopping to look at the portraits on Hannibal’s walls.

“My boarding school in Paris when I was a boy.” Hannibal replies

“Incredible amount of detail.”

When Crawford turned to look at Hannibal he was holding a scalpel and the current pencil he was using. Hannibal did not think the man noticed the glance he cast towards his jugular or his tightened grip on the scalpel itself. If something seems off to the agent, there was only a small amount of space between the two of them. Between the scalpel and his jugular. “I learned very early that the scalpel cuts points better than the pen.”

“I understand your drawings got you an internship at Johns Hopkins.”

A wan smile came to his lips. His other hand rested on the smooth wood of his desk. “I’m beginning to think you’re investigating me Agent Crawford.”

There was a long pause between them as Agent Crawford looked for his words. Hannibal sees the wheels turning before he begins speaking again.

“You were referred to me by Alana Bloom in the psychology department at Georgetown.”

“Most psychology departments are filled with ham radio enthusiasts and other personality-deficient. Dr. Bloom would be the exception.” Hannibal says with the slightest of smiles.

“You mentored her during her residency at John Hopkins?”

“I learned from her as much as she learned from me.” Hannibal said. Like how easily people can be moved by constant affection. As a young woman Miss Bloom had been a wonderfully pliable mind, eager to impress Hannibal while under his mentor ship. Her eagerness to please and provide scintillating conversation had not made her a firm candidate. It did make for a wonderful few years feeding her rude and insignificant nursing assistants and making sure in the future that she would always come when called.

“Showed me your paper in The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry. Evolutionary Origins of Social Exclusion.” Crawford said and his voice lifted with what Hannibal assumed was an eagerness to display his knowledge.

“And?” Hannibal encouraged.

“Very interesting, even to a layman.”

“A layman?” Hannibal asked, his curiosity for a moment piqued by the sudden depreciation of a man whose intelligence is obviously above average. “So many learned fellows going about in the halls of Behavioral Science at the F.B.I. and you consider yourself a layman?”

Crawford chuckled and shook his head before looking Hannibal dead in the eye. “I do when I’m in your company, Doctor. I’d like you to help me with a psychological profile.”

Chapter 2

Chapter by MostArdentlyYours

Chapter Summary

> Brown curls yielded to the back of a soapy forearm as it endeavored to reveal a pair of dynamic blue eyes too long hidden beneath eyeglass rims and overgrown bangs. A rapture in search for a witness; suspended in chastity for him who seeks to be baptized within their enigmatic intelligence. Transcendence would have stilled as Will gazed unabashedly affectionate into the inquisitive browns of his eclectic gang of mixed mutts.
>
> “Winston, this is everyone.”

Chapter Notes

> Hello! First of all Tea and I are both so honored to receive all of you guy's wonderfully kind comments and kudos! :D You have no idea how exciting and motivating they were for us!
> Just a bit about the layout of the story. We will be alternating between Hannibal and Will's point of view and the plot will start veering off the cannon universe after (we're hoping) chap 5.
> As for the cult, we did get inspiration from Goldberg's show, The Path, but there will be many major differences and none of the characters from that show will be making an appearance in this story.
> We will try to update every Friday!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For Will Graham, eye contact is best left to the socialites that make up a percentage of the world population that excludes him. After all, it’s hard to focus when thinking, “Oh, those whites are really white”, or, “He must have hepatitis”, or, “Oh, is that a burst vein?” while trying to engage in tedious pleasantry- like discussing the merits of owning a tea set, which, for the record, is an absurd concept for Will, who’d much rather discuss the merits of shoving a teabag in a damn mug of hot water and enjoying it in the blessed solitude of his front porch, than having to stare at some egomaniac sipping imperiously from a fucking teacup as they attempt to uphold mind-numbing social conventions.

And that’s the point.

The awkward shuffling of feet and uncomfortable clearing of throats are temporal phenomenons, quickly put out of mind and far easier to deal with than a discursive experience of reality that comes with other people's baggage. Will figured that out early in his youth, disciplining himself towards an adulthood governed around coveted isolation.

And which of course was exactly why he found himself driving home from the airport at 2 am on a Thursday, planning to down a goddamn bottle of Jack Daniel's so he could slur out some drunken curses at Crawford and finally get the gored body of Elise Nichols out of his head. At least, that was the plan before a brown streak of matted fur got caught in the faded yellows of his headlights, and he found himself on the front porch 3 hours later scrubbing the gnats out of a spotted retriever mix and not one drop less sober than he'd hoped to be.

"Everyone, this is Winston."

Brown curls yielded to the back of a soapy forearm as it endeavored to reveal a pair of dynamic blue eyes too long hidden beneath eyeglass rims and overgrown bangs. A rapture in search for a witness; suspended in chastity for him who seeks to be baptized within their enigmatic intelligence. Transcendence would have stilled as Will gazed unabashedly affectionate into the inquisitive browns of his eclectic gang of mixed mutts.

"Winston, this is everyone."

A wet nose nudged him into a startled embrace; the flush of his neck cooled by a hesitant tongue flicking out in soft gratitude. Will chuckled, tender warmth attaining triumph over a usually scowling front, letting the agitated wrinkles near his temple settle in slow joy.

Ah well, fuck the whiskey.

***

There were no screams. There never were, and somewhere in back of his subconscious, Will wondered why.

He reached out to touch her, palm upturned, fingers slightly bent towards the heavens, and, as if in tandem, a rack of antlers tore through the torso of Elise Nicols, their curling tips soaked in red. He stepped back. The antlers receded. He stilled, and was regarded. He turned, and she was beside him.

Sputtering gasps filled the room inducing a heaving chest to violently rock the bedpost against the wall. Winston, new to the pack and unaccustomed yet to his master's recurring night terrors, whipped his head up, body rigid and posed in suspension. The other dogs stirred but ultimately remained unresponsive, too conditioned to their master's erratic episodes be alarmed. Will propped up on his elbows, forcing himself to calm, running a shaking hand through drenched curls. His light cotton t-shirt was soaked through with sweat, and he struggled to relieve himself of it. Bicep muscles straining and bunching as he tugged the shirt over his head, dropping it with an unceremonious slap on the floor.

Winston's nose scrunched up in unattractive wrinkles as a sweaty stench, thick and masculine, settled in a claustrophobic musk about the room. He watched as Will stumbled

about grabbing a new set of sleepwear and a towel to cocoon herself in, too distracted by his shaking hands to notice the mutt's concern.

The dog stayed that way, head poised like an English pointer awaiting his master's whistle. It wasn't until the small form on the bed finally evened out its breathing, before the retriever within, brought Winston to all fours, sending him plodding softly towards the edge of Will's bed. He curled quietly in a brown heap on the floor beside the hastily discarded garments, disregarding their offending odor in order to keep vigil by his Master's side.

***

"Something is wrong with the meat."

Zeller who was focused on the abdominal wound of Elise Nichols finally joined his partners in outright staring at Will, who was leaning on a table near the corpse, lamenting the loss of intelligent non-judgmental eyes and lolling tongues waiting for him back at home.

"She has liver cancer." Zeller exclaimed, a bit taken aback.

Will rubbed his palms into the hollow of his eyes, displacing the station his glasses held on the end of his nose. Against the inky backs of his eyelids, Nichols' body lay in suspension. *This time his hands spring forward, not to touch, but to push. Her recently asphyxiated corpse yield voice-lessly to a set of buck antlers.*

The first cut splits her abdomen for me. One of the many precise incisions I will make to honor every part of her. I remove her liver- and am condemned.

Will adjusted his glasses to steel his voice from cracking, as his hands slipped out from beneath the rims,

"He's eating them."

***

This time round, Winston did not stir at the sound of his Master's cry. Not even at the groaning bedsprings and leaden thumping of Will's feet as he rolled out of bed and headed for the kitchen.

Five minutes went by. Then ten. Then twenty. A hiss of rusty hinges heralded the half hour mark as the front door swung open and Will stepped out into the night air. Winston startled to all fours at this unexpected change of routine, a worried whine sounded out in tandem to the screen door wheezing shut behind his Master. He plodded forward with care to not disturb the rest of his canine companions, claws clicking against the hardwood floor with an inexplicably comforting cadence.

Will jumped a little at the soft clattering sound the door emitted when Winston nuzzled up into the mesh screen, the black fibers forming a tiny checkerboard on the tip of the dog's nose.

"Hey, here to keep me company?"

He opened the door, and the dog ambled sleepily towards him, pausing a second to shake his fur out in the twilight chill.

“Sorry if I woke you.” Will patted his lap as he sat back down on the front steps, murmuring soft words of encouragement. His newest addition to the pack was responding remarkably well to not only Will’s touch and affections, but also his emotions. As Will softly whistled, and cooed, he wondered if perhaps Winston used to be a guide or therapy dog in the past.

But Winston wasn’t paying attention this time. Will watched an almost preternatural shift overtake his usually stoic dog. Posture ridge. Ears folded back. The fog of sleep completely dispelled from the tip of his flaring nostrils to the the end of his spotted tail flicking in suspicious, slow arcs.

Will scanned the horizon, unable to make out much in the shadow of the night’s new moon. A shiver ran through him, and he was once again reminded of his vulnerability living as he did, alone and exposed. But then a cold nose nudged at his elbow, and he moved his arm as Winston wormed his way onto his knee. He smiled, unease momentarily set aside, and closed his eyes against an oncoming breeze.

Winston’s nose flared against the gust, and though he remained placidly composed for his master’s sake, every inch of his body sung like a live wire. The air was shifting. A change subtler than the flutter of a moth’s wings, and yet with almost tasteable prominence. It left behind an inaudible whisper, preaching of truths that by no means went unheard. Stoicy had shivered beneath its intangible touch, that left the skin fevered and wanting. The cosmos became flooded its sweet cadences that seduce dormant matter to be agitated into vibration, and there was no doubt that they would all soon find themselves swept to the edge of a precipice, to the cusp of a great Becoming.

Even after Will had finally turned in for the night, Winston remained alert.

***

15 minutes before the start of his last class of the day, Will found himself trudging down the familiar route to Jack’s office, grumbling as he usually did about a livelihood outside of being summoned like a-

“Graham, I’d like you to meet someone.”

A tan hand extended into the view of his downcast gaze. How he would regret the way his eyes flitted spasmodically about then, taking in everything and nothing as they skimmed the v-neck ribbing of a cashmere sweater rested against an all encompassing chest, fluttered over the upturned curl of lips that pulled at the taut sinews of a freshly shaven jaw; rested temporarily on the white crisps of a dress shirt cuff eclipsed round a sure flick of wrist.

How he would spend many future nights in rueful remorse over his absolutely distrait behavior during this consecrated encounter; for missing that initial affectation of kindness gleaming in Hannibal’s eyes.

Chapter End Notes

BTW. I've been mulling over this for hours. I know I can say "Affectation of kindness" but am I allowed to say "kind affectation?" Anyone know?

Chapter 3

Chapter by Ilikesugarinmytea

Chapter Summary

> “You don’t know me and I suspect we will unfortunately never meet.” Hannibal stated. His voice was calm and clear, belaying the delight he felt in the prospect to the chaos that would occur and the effect that it would have on the emphatic Will Graham. He did, however, feel some sort of sadness at the loss of such a mind that had hidden himself so adeptly from the FBI. “This is a courtesy call for a man with great potential. Listen very carefully.” He paused before continuing. “Your Becoming is swiftly and unexpectedly approaching. Events and moments outside of our hands have set the wheels in motion. God has turned his all seeing gaze away from you like he has the rest of us. He is ambivalent and uncaring. There is no one to judge you. Your soul is untainted. Immortal and pure. You are ready to follow the Path. You are about to reach your Zenith. Are you listening?”
>
> “Yes.” Garrett said and there was a knowing hitch, a tremble, in his voice.
>
> “They know and they are coming. Impress me.”

Chapter Notes

> Wow, I kind of didn't expect you guy's comments and kudos but thank you so much anyways! Umm here's more Hannibal Lecter for you. Enjoy!

“In the moonlight blood looks black.” Hannibal said, almost to himself. “And because we humans must attach meaning to everything in an attempt to rationalise our universe black is the representation of evil.”

And it is reviled for being part of the natural order. A predator is evil for taking the life of its prey. A person is evil for doing whatever is necessary to ensure their survival. And in that vein God must be evil because he takes life just as dispassionately as any predator. And he must be evil because he does it with all the anger and apathy of an ill tempered old testament deity. If killing makes the soul dark, his must be black. And like him our souls are black. And black absorbs all light and color. So we must absorb all living light around us in order to light our Path. And because our souls are black and dark, we must take it from others in order to maintain our inner glow.”

In the darkness the eyes of those gathered glinted like the reflective surface of a cat's eye. Margot stood close to him sharing his heat even as the tip of her nose turned red with the cold. Annalise stood proud and tall her hair floating gently on the sharp, piercing winter winds. In Osmonds trembling grasp is the Buck's head liberated from a local household. Its dead eyes are flat and black like a shark glinting in the moonlight like a polished rock. And between Jessamyn and Mirabelle, struggling in exhausted fits and bursts, is their sacrifice. She looks exquisite in her pain and suffering. The horror painted on her face in delicate strokes. The horrible realisation that she will not return home is breathtaking. Hannibal knows like he has always know, her agony would be an exquisite spectacle.

“Tonight this tender child will give her life to us.” He says and the girl lets out a gorgeous sob. “We will absorb her essence and her light like so many others. She will be our heavenly light.” He took a step forward and bent to look her in the eye. “Do not be afraid. Your sacrifice will not be useless. Darion? It is time to Harvest.”

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Beneath Hannibal’s capable hands, the air whistled out a pair of lungs like a soft breath from the body they were no longer connected too. As he pushed all the air out of the delicate organ Margot appeared by his side with a bowl of carefully chopped onions.

“How I missed preparing dinner with you.” She said with a small wicked smile.

“Your presence has always been a delight.” He said with a delicate sniff in her direction. The faint odor of pig manure clung to the scent of spilt blood and freshly cut roses. “I have not had you at my table for so very long. What has kept you away from me Miss Verger? I hope it was not your beloved proclivities.”

“Is that jealousy I hear Dr. Lecter.” She replied with a playful tilt in her voice. The faucet clicked on and off as she washed her hands of the onions then came back to his side. “I thought I should be the jealous member of this relationship." He raised an eyebrow and she gave a soft, lyrical laugh. "You are with the FBI now. Less time for me and our sessions.”

“Green eyed envy does suit you very well my dear.” Hannibal hummed as he finished tenderizing the meat and reached for the butcher’s knife. “And perhaps I should not tell you of the man I met today in fear of further raising your ire.”

“Oh don’t hold out on me.” She said amused as she poured herself a glass of wine. “I always want to know about my competition.”

And so with a smile Hannibal cooks and tells her about his short but delightful interaction with the FBI’s newest ‘special’ agent.

“In theory the initial conversation transgressed differently than I had originally planned. I had hoped my impromptu session would be resolved in a manner that left Mr. Graham receptive and relaxed in the face of my questioning. Or perhaps ended in a manner that did not antagonize him. Mr. Graham is a rare and special find. There are many who would jump at

the chance to indulge in picking apart his mind to see how he finds those monsters that hide among us. And if he might turn into one of those monsters himself."

"But you could not resist the temptation that Mr. Graham presented could you Hannibal." Margot mused. Her delicate eyebrows were arched in amusement. "The FBI dropped its favorite toy in your lap and you could not help but attempt to twist it to see where its joints might pop and break."

At that Hannibal smiled, showing pointed eyeteeth to a woman who was not and never had been particularly frightened by them. Margot, in turn, regarded him with her usual cool, calm gaze.

"Something like that." He replied and looked at her and Darion who had joined them in the kitchen when dinner was almost finished. "Eat your food."

He took this time to observe the two. Margot Verger resembled a china doll. And like a china doll, there came an implication of girlish innocence. Any Unenlightened would make the assumption from looking at her wide glass green eyes, small mouth and pleasantly petite frame that she was a doll that needed to be taken care of. It was instinctive to protect things smaller than oneself. To extend protection to those one assumed or had proved were weaker. He supposed that that drew them to her. Margot, however, was no empty headed beauty. Those verdant eyes, if one looked closely or perhaps the way Hannibal knew how to look, held bored hunger and keen intelligence. A hunger that he had noticed and decided to ameliorate from beneath a canvas of carefully rouged lips and expensive manicured nails.

Hannibal himself could not actually take full credit for her behavior and the way she had flourished before he discovered her. It was the product of her upbringing and Hannibal silently thanked Mason as he listened to her report of her brother's latest abuses. It was the only thing he could thank the man for, the disgusting pig that he was. If he had been looking to drive his sister away, he had succeeded. And she had ended up in a place where she could flourish in a way she was meant to.

Dorian was very similar to her. He was, in complete contrast with Margot, tall and lanky. There was nothing particularly elegant about the young man but that, just like the rest of him, would eventually grow to fit him in the future. His hair was thick, unruly and full of curls. Hannibal had mostly given up attempting to tame them as it was a pyrrhic victory when they could be flattened and subjugated.

Dorian however had a very different innocence about him. He still wondered at the world. Hannibal had rid him of any innocence involved in the art of murder and Harvest but the boy still found the world a bright place with none of the darkness that Hannibal lent to it. And it would be something that he would be using for every Harvest afterwards.

Just like Margot's doll like innocence, Darion's delightful and constantly upbeat attitude was what drew people to him. Darion had, unlike Margot, had been shaped by his careful hands for the last eleven years. He gazed at Darion as he carried on a conversation with Margot on the other side of the table. Everything that Hannibal had learned had gone into this child. His son in almost all but blood.

“What are you going to do about Agent Will Graham?” Dorian looked to Hannibal, startling him out of his reverie. For a long moment they stared quietly at each other from across the table until Hannibal smiled.

“I think I will make him breakfast.”

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The next morning finds Hannibal seated at Will Graham’s rented kitchen table. The small room is saturated with the scent of the other man. It is a peculiar and interesting perfume of musk, dog, smoky whiskey and, surprisingly, peaches. The scent of peaches is so sweet he is not sure if it is natural or perhaps the indication that something is amiss. Either way it is very nearly intoxicating.

Will Graham sits before him, slick with sweat, and completely unapologetic for it. Hannibal wonders faintly if the perspiration that sticks the curls to his forehead is evidence of some horrifying phantasm or something more pleasant. He would very much like to know. And perhaps draw him in the midst. Will Graham is classically beautiful and Hannibal silently compares him to Michelangelo's David and the *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* as he shovels down the breakfast Hannibal has brought. Scrambled eggs and Cassie Boyle. The young girl whose body had been found in a field a few days earlier. How tragic.

“I would apologize for my analytical ambush but I know I will soon be apologizing again and you’ll tire of that eventually so I have to consider using apologies sparingly.” Hannibal said as he watched Will eat.

“Just keep it professional.” Will replied between bites.

“Or we could socialize like adults, god forbid we become friendly.”

“I don’t find you that interesting.” Will stated blandly with an offhand glance. It was offhand, callous and rude. What a delight Will Graham would prove to be.

“You will.” Hannibal promises before changing the subject. “Agent Crawford tells me you have a knack for the monsters.”

“That’s a superstition.”

“I called Dr. Bloom about you.” Hannibal stated, mostly to see Will’s reaction as he ate. In their most recent dinner conversation, Alana had told Hannibal about Will. It had been unusual because it had taken much cajoling to get her to reveal even a little about the other man. And when she did there had been a flush to her cheeks that he found curious mixed with the protective, almost mothering tone she had adopted concerning Graham. She had asked him to not bother him too much. So he decided to mix a bit of lies with the truth. “She wouldn’t gossip, not a word. She’s very protective of you. Smitten, I would say. She asked me to keep an eye on you.”

After that Will regards him with what Hannibal assumed was suspicion before speaking. “I don’t think the Shrike killed that girl in the field.”

“The devil is in the details. What didn’t your Copy Cat do to the girl in the field? What gave it away?” Hannibal asks. He hopes there is not excessive eagerness in his voice. Or that Will does not pick up on his frankly inappropriate curiosity. He is just eager to know what Will thinks of him and the others and the help that they had so lovingly provided him. Especially dear winsome Darion. He did so wonderfully on his Harvest and been so excited with his first kill. And her blood was still under his fingernails.

“Everything.” There is frustration in his voice. “It’s like he had to show me a negative so I could see the positive. That crime scene was practically gift-wrapped.” and then he paused for a moment and looked at Hannibal for a long tired moment. “It was like a gift that multiple people worked on.”

“The mathematics of human behavior. All those ugly variables. Perhaps he had or needed friends to help.” Hannibal said and fixed his eyes and curiosity on Will. “Are you reconstructing his fantasies? What kind of problems does he have?”

“He has a few.” Darion most certainly didn’t but Hannibal pushed the indignation down. “It's possible they might too.”

“Ever have any problems, Will?”

“No.”

“Of course you don’t.” Hannibal nearly rolled his eyes. If this is to be his introduction session it would continue go poorly if Will continued to close himself off. The conversation was delightfully stimulating. “You and I are just alike. Problem free. Nothing about us to feel horrible about.” He pauses for a moment, a bit theatrically before continuing. “I think Uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little tea-cup, the finest china used for only special guests.”

“How do you see me?” Will asked and for a moment Hannibal basked in his attention.

“The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by.” He smiled without teeth. “Finish your breakfast.”

--

For the rest of the day he affects amusement and curiosity at Will’s job and the inner working of the F.B.I. It is mostly interesting because of Will and his heavenly curls and the sardonic twist of his lips. And it would’ve been perfect if not for the rude woman reporting their movements to, he assumes, an equally rude acquaintance. And then it happens. A moment of inspiration brightens Will Graham’s face and it begins with a name. Garret Jacob Hobbs.

It is a familiar name. Hannibal knows the man, distantly, and cannot help but wonder what delightful carnage the man has caused under his distant, indirect tutelage.

“What is it about Garret Jacob Hobbs you find so peculiar?” Hannibal asks, watching Graham as he stares intently at the manila folder as if it holds the secrets of the universe.

“Left a phone number. No address.”

“Therefore he has something to hide?” Hannibal asks curious to know what Will has divined from this.

“Everyone else left an address. You have an address for Mr. Hobbs?”

Afterwards Will and the woman are so taken with the prospect of the lead that it only takes an evidence box tipped over a railing for Hannibal to slip away mostly unnoticed. Because of that, it takes very little slip away; back into the trailer, pick up the phone and dial the number that so excited William.

“Hello?” A soft, distinctly feminine voice answers.

“I need to speak with Garret Jacob Hobbs.” He said.

“Just a second.”

“Hello.” The man’s voice in the phone is vaguely familiar but it is likely that if Hannibal saw him or anyone else for that matter they would find his face delightfully forgettable.

“Mister Garrett Jacob Hobbs?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t know me and I suspect we will unfortunately never meet.” Hannibal stated. His voice was calm and clear, belaying the delight he felt in the prospect to the chaos that would occur and the effect that it would have on the emphatic Will Graham. He did, however, feel some sort of sadness at the loss of such a mind that had hidden himself so adeptly from the FBI. “This is a courtesy call for a man with great potential. Listen very carefully.” He paused before continuing. “Your Becoming is swiftly and unexpectedly approaching. Events and moments outside of our hands have set the wheels in motion. God has turned his all seeing gaze away from you like he has the rest of us. He is ambivalent and uncaring. There is no one to judge you. Your soul is untainted. Immortal and pure. You are ready to follow the Path. You are about to reach your Zenith. Are you listening?”

“Yes.” Garrett said and there was a knowing hitch, a tremble, in his voice.

“They know and they are coming. Impress me.”

Chapter 4

Chapter by MostArdentlyYours

Chapter Summary

Hannibal's voice broke into his ruminations, "You say he wouldn't dare assume a role of omnipotence. Why do you think it is so?"

Will opened his eyes, blinking out the blurry film that had formed beneath his tired lids, "Connections are important to him. He was a very lonely man before he found his. Perhaps it takes the form of a mentor, a paternal or maternal figure- someone he worships on a golden pedestal," Hannibal watched with with undisguised intrigue as the man began to make a circuit around the doctor's office, his hands stuffed in the pockets of his trousers, "What he created was something greater than the victims; than his labor. It is an offering, an act of devotion."

Will stopped before one of the many paintings that adorned the walls of Hannibal's office, "Capturing a still-life of Connections. An abstract of their impact. He crafted with care, dare I save love, for a savior who had intimately altered his desolation."

Chapter Notes

Okay so first things first a THOUSAND APOLOGIES for the late update! I was out most of this week and just had time to finish some additions and loads of editing. I hope that the chapter length can make up for the tardiness!

Anything I mention here about how guns, private businesses, the FBI, and how forensic science works, are from Wikipedia ^.^'

Next chapter should update on Friday as expected!

The clapping was unexpected… and extremely inappropriate.

"Thank you…" The unwarranted circus act continued, and Will snapped.

"Please stop that." The applause hesitantly puttered out into what would have been an extremely awkward silence had Will not proceeded to leap straight into his lecture with unapologetic bitterness.

“This is how I caught Garret Jacob Hobbs.”

A photo flashed on screen and the deceased Hobbs lay stiffly against the kitchen floor; the corpse rigid from the rigor-mortis that set in after EMT and Minnesota police had their way with the crime scene and before the FBI could come in to secure the area and snap photos. The man’s body was ripped through with bullet-holes that decorated his white dress shirt in the form of ten gaping wounds; his eyes glazed with a muted- bluish film that...

looked as slick as the bright blood bubbling out from the slit throat Will struggled to close between his fingers. Hobb’s body shook in mirror of Abigail's convulsions beneath him, gasping, clutching at a torso resembling that of a domino, dotted in red. He wheezed out a humorless laugh and threw himself backwards.

“See? See”

Will flinched, bringing himself back to reality. His car. He was parked. He glanced at his watch- 6:47pm. No longer at the academy. What lay before him was a small and unassuming brick building. An extremely unostentatious thing considering that it belonged to the man he had come to know of as Hannibal Lector. He was surprised that he was unable to find a single pretentious nameplate gleaming: “Dr. Lector: Psycho House.” A single humble oak door stood in the way between Will and what he hoped to be a signed psyche eval. allowing him to return to fieldwork. Will sighed and ran a hand through his hair, mussing up his curls. It should only take a few weeks to accomplish… if he could just keep it together.

Needles sit jutting from strained veins and arteries. The measured downbeats of her heart rate monitor beep in tandem to the steady pulse thumping against a neck brace keeping her very throat from splitting in two. Abigail.

Will sighed, slamming the car door behind him, wondering if he even wanted to keep it together at all.

“Good evening Will, no troubles on your journey here I hope?”

“No-” Will paused to take in the room, cascading beige and crimson curtains demanding his attention from their matching walls. A wooden ladder lifted his eyes away from an incongruously turquoise couch to a second floor lined with shelves upon oak shelves of books. Ah, pretension finally rears its six-figure head.

“Please take a seat.”

Will did, and was proceeding to tug off his coat, when a yellow slip of paper slid into view, seeking his consideration.

“What’s this?” He asked warily, before his eyes landed on the neat cursive of Hannibal’s signature.

“Your Psychological Evaluation. You're totally functional and more or less sane. Well done.”

Will looked up in disbelief, “Did you just rubber stamp me?”

“Jack Crawford may lay his weary head to rest knowing he didn't break you and our conversation can proceed unobstructed by paperwork.”

Will fell silent under a wave of relief mixed with trepidation. Mostly, though, he was wondering if Hannibal truly comprehended the extent of what he was about to release into to the world with only a few strokes of that neat script.

The doctor must have sensed his hesitation, “I hear that you’ve been spending quite some time in Abigail's hospital room. Perhaps the responsibility you feel in regards to the Hobbs case is holding you back.”

The sinews of Will’s jaw tensed as he gritted his teeth, “Doesn’t it for you?”

Hannibal paused at the snippy comment, letting his silence linger just long enough for the air to take on a tint of his displeasure as it worked to irk Will into a defiant scowl, “It does.” His tone lightened in reassuring increments as he strode towards his desk, letting the momentary chink in their conversation slide into the background of unimportance. For some reason this infuriated Will even more.

“I feel a staggering amount of obligation,” Hannibal continued, leaning against the polished oak of his workspace, “and I am prepared, if she so desires, to serve Abigail Hobbs to the best of my ability and as if she were my own progeny.”

Will’s laugh was sharp and biting, “Taking up the mantle as the surrogate father, Dr. Lector?”

Hannibal smiled, “I do not consider it an undue burden. Though for you Will, I would not be surprised if you end up furthering the role to something akin to martyrdom.”

Will weighed the pros and cons of rebuttal before sighing and deciding to drop the subject.

“Jack thinks Abigail might’ve helped her dad kill those girls.”

***

The rhythmic explosions of gunpowder and foreseeable kick of the hammer afterwards faded into the white static of Will’s mind as he fired over and over again into the paper cutout of a man’s silhouette. His brain was refreshingly blank for once, temporarily free from flashbacks of Hobb’s bloody torso, littered with holes. He emptied his last round, and checked for accuracy, frowning at his results.

“I'm pretty sure firearm "accuracy" isn't a prerequisite for teaching.”

He turned at the familiar voice- Beverly. She strode down the gun range, a quirky smirk curling on her lips, long black hair unfurling behind her. Her walk carried a spring to it that seemed to say, “I’m about to start a conversation with you and you’re not about to stop me.”

Will clipped in a new target, and started reloading his firearm, trying his best to make it obvious that her presence was not exactly welcome but knowing all the while that any efforts to do so would be futile.

“Took me ten shots to drop Hobbs,” was all he offered.

Bev didn’t miss a beat, “Zeller wanted to give you the bullets he pulled out of Hobbs in an acrylic case, but I told him you wouldn't think it was funny.”

Will shrugged, sending his new target down the line.

“I suggested he turn them into a Newton's Cradle, one of those clacking swinging ball things.”

Will smirked, imagining sticking something like that on his desk if only just to watch Jack pinch the bridge of his nose and silently pray.

“Now that would have been funny.”

The two of them shared a brief moment of silent camaraderie, Will still conservative with his personal space and flickers of eye-contact and Beverly still just as determined to not care. He’d only fired a few rounds, most of them completely flying clear of the target, when he nearly jumped out of his skin as Beverly placed a firm grip on his right shoulder.

“Man you are tight.”

Will coughed, resisting the urge to shrug her off, “I got stabbed when I was a cop.”

“Oh yeah? How’d that happen?”

He went quiet. Beverly must have sensed that she’d gone too far, “No no, you don’t have to tell me.” She adjusted his shoulder and flared out his elbows, “See if that helps with the recoil.”

Will breathed a silent sigh of relief, and fired a few more rounds, finding that the stance helped a lot with his control.

“It’s better,” he admitted, his eyes flickered up to hers for a brief moment before it settled on a spot on her cheeks, “You come all the way down here to teach me how to shoot?”

Beverly’s grin seemed open and full of amusement. Her smiles were always blurring with a half smirk that reached her eyes in a way that made it seem like she had some inside joke running through her head all the time. Will found himself inexplicably wanting to offer an only slightly wry smile in return.

She crossed her arms, “No, Jack sent me down here to find out what you know about gardening.”

***

“This may have been premature.”

Hannibal thumbed the corner of the psych eval that Will slid towards him.

“What did you see? Out in the field?”

Will answered with great reluctance, “Hobbs.”

“An association?”

“A hallucination. I saw him lying there… in someone else’s grave.”

Hannibal paused, as if rolling something over in his mind. When he spoke again, his voice had attained a more solemn timbre, “Is it harder imagining the thrill somebody else feels killing, now that you've done it yourself?”

He was rewarded with a hesitant glance from Will, though quickly averted. Will tried not to think of the inevitable conversation his slight nod would incite.

Hannibal allowed time for the room to become marinated in that admission, before surprising Will with an abrupt change of subject.

“Your “farmer” left the arms of his “crop” exposed. Why? Perhaps it is to hold their hands? To feel the life leaving their body?”

Will squeezed his eyes shut as he massaged the bridge of his nose, grateful for the diversion, “That would imply a pursuit of power or control. He is not someone who would dare play god... And they weren’t crops, they were fertilizer. The bodies were covered in fungus.”

He could see the veiny tendrils of mycelium sliding along body after body of unconscious victims. The sprouting fungi creep their way about these shallow graves, touching his hands to hers, her feet to his, their hearts to one another. An intricate web of connections.

Hannibal’s voice broke into his ruminations, “You say he wouldn’t dare assume a role of omnipotence. Why do you think it is so?”

Will opened his eyes, blinking out the blurry film that had formed beneath his tired lids, “Connections are important to him. He was a very lonely man before he found his. Perhaps it takes the form of a mentor, a paternal or maternal figure- someone he worships on a golden pedestal,” Hannibal watched with with undisguised intrigue as the man began to make a circuit around the doctor’s office, his hands stuffed in the pockets of his trousers, “What he created was something greater than the victims; than his labor. It is an offering, an act of devotion.”

Will stopped before one of the many paintings that adorned the walls of Hannibal’s office, “Capturing a still-life of Connections. An abstract of their impact. He crafted with care, dare I save love, for a savior who had intimately altered his desolation.”

Hannibal hummed, “Humans are social beings. We crave connection and intimacy. Our mushroom farmer seems to have found a place where he belongs; willing to sacrifice his life and freedom in honor of such relationships. In the face of our embedded biological tendency towards companionship, it seems you have created something of a family for yourself as well, Will.”

Will snorted, running a hand through the back of his curls as he returned to his seat, “I created a pack of strays.”

Hannibal inclined his head, “So you have informed me. But I was referring to Abigail Hobbs.”

Will went quiet at the mention of her name, just as Hannibal predicted he would, “I wonder at the extents are you prepared to undergo, in order to support the ones you love.” Hannibal walked around his desk, lowering himself into the seat before Will. He fixed him with a gaze that held only a kindly reminder, “But you can not do it alone Will.”

If Will had not quickly averted his stare in the next moment, he just may have seen the underlying threat sparkling like well aged malbec in Hannibal's all too maroon eyes.

***

It was an hours drive from Dr. Lector’s practice to Wolf Trap so, Will decided to stopped by a convenience store on the way to pick up a snack. It wasn’t long before he spotted a small mart on the side of a long stretch of empty road. Will guessed that it was most likely privately owned with its charmingly simple name of “Little’s” and its uniquely Southern Gothic construction that looked so unorthodox in a place like Baltimore, Maryland.

Through the store’s quaint glass windows and behind its neat front counter, a young boy sat bowed over a book. He looked up as Will pushed opened the door, the bell serenading in his arrival, “Hello welcome to Little’s”

Will nodded and made a beeline for the chip aisle, noticing as he did that a couple of the fridge lights for refreshments were turned off and that a mop and bucket full of water was resting by the counter. It looked like the place was about to close soon and he decided to hurry in his selections.

The bell jingled again and the boy’s hospitable greeting was interrupted with a curt, “Two Smirnoffs.”

“Yes sir, may i see your ID?”

The man pulled out his wallet muttering, “Bet you sell it to your little prepubescent friends all the time, god forbid you don't check a 30 year old’s card though.”

The kid scanned over the ID for few seconds, before he started reaching for the vodka, “No sir, I am required by law to check the ID’s of all customers buying alcoholic beverages.”

The other man made a noise that was something of an indignant humph, but left it at that.

Will let their conversation fade into background static, as he grabbed a couple of lays and a coke. His eyes fell upon a sign hanging next to the beef jerky:

Venison- $15 per pound. See clerk for details.

The murmurings of the other two men in store arrested his attention before he could examine any further as their exchanges started to take on a heated tone.

“I’m sorry sir, I’ve tried swiping it multiple times, but it’s still declining for me.”

“Well you're not doing it right! Try it again!”

The boy swiped the man’s credit card again and shook his head, “I am sorry. However you are always welcome to come back tomorrow-”

The man fumed, “Damn you, let me do it.” He began to make his way behind the register.

“Sir you’re not allowed behind the counter.”

Will grabbed the man’s bicep, “He said it was declined. Leave the liquor and go.”

The guy tried to elbow Will in the stomach, but the Agent quickly locked his arm behind him, twisting it upwards in a way that he was trained to know would cause pain. The man let out a prolonged yell.

“Alright! Alright! Fuck! Let me go!”

Will did and the man sprung away from him rubbing his shoulder. His glare was venomous, “I could call the police on you for that! That was basically assault!”

Will’s laugh was humorless as he pulled out his badge, “Go ahead, you’ll be charged for disturbing the peace.”

The man studied the boxy letters of F-B-I scrawled across Will’s identification warily, before deciding it wouldn’t be worth it to start something over a bottle of alcohol. He huffed and turned back towards the kid behind the counter, offering him a nasty glare and snatching his credit card back, before leaving the store.

Will watched the door slam shut behind him, then directed his gaze at the cashier, “You okay?”

The boy nodded, “Yes sir, Thank you for intervening.” He looked at Will’s purchase, and gestured towards his chips, “I can get that for you now if you'd like.”

Will laid his stuff on the counter with a murmur of thanks, paying with cash. When he turned to leave, he spotted the rowdy customer from before idling in his car towards the back of the lot, no doubt lying in wait for Will to leave before returning to harass the kid for his drinks.

The boy’s voice sounded out behind him, noticing his hesitation, “It’s alright, I’ll just lock the door behind you.”

Will didn’t even stop to think about it, he shook his head, “I’ll stay and make sure you get to your car. How long till your shift ends?”

The boy, began locking up the register, “I’m done now actually, I think it should only take me about 15 minutes to clean up.”

Will nodded, “Alright I can wait.”

“Nothing happens most of the time though. Really sir, I’ll be okay.”

Will ignored his placations, making his stance clear, “I’m Will Graham, just call me Will. What’s your name?”

“Pleasure to meet you sir, my name is Darion.” The boy extended his hand in a friendly gesture.

His voice was soft but handshake firm, though- just a touch on the side of too firm, revealing his attempt to exude confidence not yet solidified. Will took in the unruly curls and bright eyes set on a face still unstinting with sincerity. The kid didn’t look much older than 18.

“You close up alone like this often?”

Darion nodded, coming out from behind the desk. He had a spray bottle and wet rag in his hands, “Thank you again sir, you really don’t have to do this.” But the boy made his way to the front door, locking it.

Will grunted in reply and leaned back against the counter, arms crossed, waiting as Darion meticulously turned off all the refrigerator lights and wiped down the counter tops, returning to grab the bucket of soapy water up front and start mopping down the store.

As they the silence between them began to lengthen, the atmosphere started to take on an awkward hue, and Will actually breathed an internal sigh of relief when Darion’s gentle voice sounded out behind the candy isle, his breath slightly labored from exertion, “I saw your badge. What’s working for the FBI like? If you don’t mind my asking?”

He still despised small talk, and if it were any other normally functioning adult beside him, Will would have returned the inquisition with a curt and sarcastic gibe, forcing the conversation back into awkward suspension. But he forced himself to be civil, after all the boy’s just a kid, and Will wasn’t a complete ass- even if some would beg to differ, “I’m not really a cop. I just teach a few classes at Quantico and get called to do some criminal profiling here and there.”

“That’s still law enforcement right?” Darion finished and started dragging the bucket back towards the counter, the clean soapy water now a soup of grey filth, “You’re training a new generation of FBI agents to serve and protect us in the future, as you catch the criminals of today- Excuse me sir,” Darion pulled the bucket behind the counter, heading towards a small door leading to the back of the store, “It sound’s like an amazing profession. I’m sure I will be very blessed if I could find a career that will make half as much of an impact on society as you do now.”

The kid looked up at Will with something akin to a bashful smile and all Will could think was that if that spew of unfiltered fawning came from anyone but Darion, he would’ve promptly

ended the discussion. But it was hard to find insincerity in the boy's excited tone.

Will cleared his throat, feeling inexplicably self-conscious, "You thinking about working for the FBI?"

Darion shook his head, "I don't know, I'm actually trying-"

The sound of a cell phone went off in the back and with a quick apology to Will, the boy quickly pushed the dirty bucket of mop water past the door and disappeared. After a few seconds of indistinguishable murmuring, Will heard the sound of pouring water and groaning pipes followed by some more indiscernible thumping and clanging noises as Darion puttered around behind the door. Will looked back outside, glad to find that the rude customer from before was nowhere to be found, most likely given up and off to another convenience store to get his liquor. It didn't take long before Darion reappeared behind him, a book bag slung over his right shoulder.

"Sorry about that sir, but as I was saying, I'm actually trying to figure it out for myself. My father wants me to experiment with my talents in all areas, so I'm sure he wouldn't mind if I decide to pursue a path in law enforcement."

Will hummed, "I see. Thats nice of your father."

The two of them weaved their way out of the store, "I bet your father's very proud of what you do sir," Darion began locking up behind them, his fingers fumbling somewhat with the keys in his hands, no doubt a bit numb from the combination of cold mop water and the evening's autumn chill. Will was struck with a memory of himself back when he was 16. The cold Michigan air biting into his fingerless gloves as he squatted, hands buried deep in the abdomen of a boat engine; fumbling with a wrench.

"Na, I lost both my parents when I was pretty young." The moment the words left his lips, Will was surprised by how easily he had allowed them to slip. Maybe it was because he was exhausted and just didn't really give a shit about the fact at this point. He felt reassured knowing that he would probably never meet the kid again anyways.

Darion went quiet for a while. Will heard the last lock snick reassuringly and he pulled on the door for a quick check. Will expected a condolence, what he wasn't expecting was, "Me too"

Will tried to hide the shock in his voice, "The father you spoke of before isn't your biological one?"

Darion's smile was a little sad, "Unfortunately not. He adopted me when I was eleven."

Will flicked his gaze into Darion's for a very brief moment of eye contact and was struck by the shine of sincerity he found in the boy's soft brown orbs.

"My mother died when I was very young. Alcohol consumed my biological father afterwards, and I probably would have followed him if my father hadn't found me trespassing on his property one day," Darion laughed. Will wondered if the boy felt the same illogical

security that Will did in confessing such secrets to complete strangers. Either that, or the kid just really didn't care anymore, having found his peace with his current family.

"Sorry to hear that."

"Not at all. I think it was meant to be," Darion's smile was somber but ingenious. He extended his hand once more, "Thank you again for waiting with me sir, it was a pleasure talking with you."

Will shook his hand, feeling awkward to still be addressed so formally, especially after such an intimately personal conversation, "Please… Will is really fine."

Darion laughed, sweeping some of his unruly curls out of his eyes, "No no, how could I, it'll be rude."

"It's rude to make someone uncomfortable as well you know." Will forced his usual biting sarcasm out of his tone, trying to end his gentle prod with a lighthearted lilt, which evidently was ineffective because the next thing he knew, a soft flush spread had spread across Darion face as he ducked his head such in a way that surprised Will at how much it reminded him of himself.

"Sorry si- … that wasn't my intention..."

Will hurried to reassure him, "okay… Nevermind. I don't really care."

The kid fidgeted with his keys for a moment, "Um… how about a compromise then, would Mr. Graham be okay?"

Will snorted, "Yeah, yeah that's fine," relieved that he wouldn't be ending their conversation on an unhappy note, "Nice meeting you too Darion. That your car over there?" he asked, pointing at the dark silhouette of some antique looking set of wheels in the far corner of the parking lot.

Darion nodded pulling out a set of car keys and pressing a button. A moment later the sleek black car lit up. Will did a double take. It wasn't some junky antique barely rolling on its four wheels. It was a god damn Bentley.

"What the hell are you doing at a convenience store?"

The boy laughed ducking his head again. Will caught a glimpse of a flushed ear poking out from beneath the curls despite the kids efforts to conceal it.

"I'm just helping out a close friend of the family."

Will wished the boy a nice night still amazed at the fact that Darion was out here at risk of getting mugged and killed every night when he could be working at some snobby desk job at his rich father's booming business or something. He waited until Darion had gotten to his car and locked his doors before pulling out of the lot, ultimately concluding that he would hate to see a nice kid like this one turned into some spoiled brat.

Once Will was safely of sight, Darion released a soft breath and searched up a district phonebook on his cell. He blew into his cupped hands as the page loaded, rubbing them together to encourage circulation into his cold fingertips and turning the heat up to full blast in the car. It didn't take long for the shivering to stop. His fingers flew across his phone's touchscreen, typing the name Andrew Caldwell into the search bar.

***

"He's been soaking in a highly concentrated mixture of hardwoods, shredded newspaper, and pig poop. Perfect for growing mushrooms and other fungi."

Will and his forensics team of 10 percent sagacity and 90 percent sass were crowded around the latest victim of their mushroom murderer.

Zeller interrupted, "Wasn't the mushrooms. What killed all of them was kidney failure, he was force feeding them sugar water."

"And like recovering alcoholics, the shrooms crave such things. Well, as much as a mushrooms can crave anything." Bev pointed out and threw one her signature smirks in Brian's direction, "So maybe someone is preying on recovering alcoholics?"

Price snorted at the subsequent glare Zeller fixed on Bev saying, "No worries Brian, I'm definitely not recovering."

"Alcoholics aren't the only ones with compromised endocrine systems," Will cut in, choosing to remain oblivious to the snide comments and glares, "They all died of kidney failure? Death by diabetic ketoacidosis?"

Zeller looked at Beverly accusingly, still sore over her comment about Price's drinking, "Did *you* know they were diabetic?"

Price cut in, trying to ease the tension between Bev and Zeller, "Well, we don't know if they're diabetic…"

Will plowed forward mercilessly, "They're all diabetics. He induces a coma and puts them in the ground. Changes their medication. He's a doctor or a pharmacist or works somewhere in medical services."

Zeller looked up, momentarily setting aside his quarrel with Bev, "We need to tell Jack."

***

It took Beverly a few days to find the pharmacy that Elton Stammets was currently employed at, but didn't take long for Jack to organize a raid, which was why Will was shocked that the man had somehow gotten word of their plans and had long deserted his pharmaceutical practice and home by then. Jack was incensed when they realized an article that Freddie Lounds had written may have given Stamments the slip. He called a team of four to storm Lounds' apartment cursing the whole way. Zeller, who had willingly volunteered for the excursion, remained quiet throughout the whole ordeal, and it wasn't until he was bending

down, to release Freddie from her bonds that he broke his self-imposed silence with a quiet whisper:

“I trusted you.”

Chapter 5

Chapter by Ilikesugarinmytea

Chapter Summary

> The silence was nearly complete if not for the sound of the house humming around them. It was holy, almost a consecration of the ground they shared. Enough to make it holy even in the eyes of the absent God so many worshipped, the one to whom their pseudo-Abrahamic sacrifices called out to at the moment of their demise. It was beautiful. “The FBI may be closing in on our brother but now is his time.” He looked at those gathered at his table and the ones in the room. Mrs. Komeda. Margot. Darion. Those he had honored with with his closeness looked on in quiet awe and gazed at Eldon with quiet praise. “But this is his Becoming and it will be an experience akin to all of ours. It will not be easy. It will not be smooth. And it will not be kind.”

Chapter Notes

> Thank you all so much for the kudos and comments!! This Friday and Saturday we have a double feature!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What kind of loin?”

“Pork.” Hannibal replied as he seated himself. A half smile rose to his lips as he picked up his silverware. Michael Connington had certainly behaved like a pig before Annalise had gotten her hands on him. A liar and a con artist who had swindled dozens of the elderly of their pensions. His Light, however tainted and dimmed, would light the perilous twists and turns of her Path and feed his household for some time. There were so many dishes that he had yet to prepare.

Jack Crawford smiled too. But not at the same thing.

“It’s rare I get a home-cooked meal.” He said beginning to cut into his meal and took his first bite of Connington. Hannibal did as well and savored the taste. The metal tang of his blood was an undertone to the sweet tartness of the strawberries, raspberries and currants of the

Cumberland sauce and complemented the succulent taste of his flesh. “My wife and I both work. Hard as I tried not to, I married my mother.”

“Your mother didn’t cook?” Hannibal asked in between bites and Jack Crawford gave a soft, sort of depreciating laugh.

“She cooked.” He looked up from his plate with a smile. “I just wished she didn’t. She used to make this dish she liked to call Oriental noodles. Spaghetti, soy sauce, bouillon cubes and spam. I was a thin child.”

“Next time bring your wife.” Hannibal smiled back. “I’d love to have you both for dinner.”

Perhaps they would be the main course of his next dinner party. Maybe a curry paired with white wine. Or a meat pie with something sweet to follow. After he’d gained enough trust that he would willingly go into Hannibal's slaughterhouse and offer nothing but a contented sigh. It would a long while from now though Hannibal contemplated. Jack, despite the dull normalcy he provided Hannibal in both conversation and observation, was a smart man. Anything untoward or suspicious would not be overlooked.

Jack started to speak again after a long moment of silence ringed by movement and the scratch of silverware on ceramic . “I’m curious why Will went back to see you after you signed off on him. He was so adamant about not going to begin with.”

“I lost the stick, kept the carrot.” Hannibal replied.

“Insisting on a Psych Eval for a guy like Will Graham is hardly a stick.” Jack said and took a sip of wine. Obviously, Jack did not know very much about his prize pony.

“As a psychiatric professional, I feel duty-bound that blackmailing somebody into therapy tends to negate positive benefits.”

Like an animal that showed aversion to veterinary services, Will Graham had the same wariness born of prior experience. Hannibal had seen it in his eyes. Just like a wary animal, Will would react violently if forced.

Jack seemed intent on ignoring that statement as he took a sip of wine, a Piorat from Catalonia.

“Why did he go back?”

“A guy like Will Graham?” Hannibal paused. “I’m sure he recognizes the necessity of his own support structure if he’s to go on supporting you in the field.”

“Will Graham knows exactly what’s going on in his head, which is why he doesn’t want anyone in there.” Jack replied, confident in his analysis. Hannibal wondered distantly as he continued to enjoy his meal what made him so confident in his opinion. If, he assumed, Jack continued in this manner there might be pleasantly surprising outcomes. For Hannibal.

“Are you not accustomed to broken ponies in your stable?” Hannibal asked and Jack paused.

“You think Will's a broken pony?”

“I think you think Will’s a broken pony. You ever lost a pony, Jack?”

At that the other man smiled at was ringed with unpleasant bitterness and hostility.
“If you're asking if I've ever lost someone in the field, yes. Why?”

“I want to understand why you're so delicate with Will. Because you don't trust him or because you're afraid of losing another pony?”

“I’ve had my Psyche Eval.” Jack replied, defensiveness hidden by a warm smile.

“Not by me.” Hannibal smiled warmly. “You've already told me about your mother. Why stop there?”

“I don’t think I need to elaborate.” Jack said, unbudging. “Or that I need to be coerced into –“

“Father, why weren’t you in the study?” Darion stepped into the room, oblivious to the Agent’s presence for the moment. “I thought we were going to –“

“We have a guest, Darion.” Hannibal interrupted, looking from the young man in his pressed slacks and baby blue shirt to Jack Crawford, sitting on the opposite side of the table. Darion looked from him to the other man, apparently more surprised than the agent on whom he had barged in on. “Do not be rude. Introduce yourself.” Hannibal prompted after a long moment of silence.

“You have a son.” Jack said as he stood to shake Darion’s hand. He seemed…astonished at

the thought.

“Yes.” Hannibal said as he too stood and rounded the table to stand behind Darion. “He is mine in all but blood. Darion, this is Agent Jack Crawford from the F.B.I. Jack this is my son Darion Philomenes Lorelei Lecter.”

“It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance sir.” Darion said as his hands went to politely holding the folder he was carrying. “I’ve heard so much from my father about the good work the F.B.I has done in the past months. I think it’s amazing the work that you do, protecting the public from those who disturb the peace.”

“It sounds like we might have an F.B.I recruit in the future.” Jack said with a smile and the two of them shared a chuckle. The tips of Darion’s ears turned pink.

“That may very well be true.” Hannibal said resting his hands on Darion’s narrow shoulders. “I am hoping though that Darion might have the opportunity to explore more career opportunities. But he has the instincts of a hunter. Perhaps that will lend to a future career in law enforcement.”

“Or maybe a professor.” Darion added. Both Hannibal and Jack looked at him. “I don’t know if I would be cut out for field duty but I would enjoy being able to teach the future generations of law enforcement. Just like Mr. Graham.”

“You know Will?” There was a menacing tone in Jack’s voice. “Doctor I thought these meetings –"

“Are entirely confidential.” Hannibal assured the other man. “Darion must’ve met Will at some earlier point.”

“He’s your patient?” There was surprise and embarrassment in Darions voice although Hannibal gave him a soothing smile. “I’m sorry I didn’t know. I met him at Little’s. A customer was being…rude and after sending him off Mr. Graham stayed with me as I closed up. He’s a kind man.”

“Really?” Jack seemed skeptical.

“Yes. And I’d like to say –

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-that Garret Jacob Hobbs was a good man.” Darion looked at those gathered around the table

with an expression of intense grief. “It is unfortunate that his wife was taken from this world by his own hand and that his daughter is injured in the hospital. But he was a good man. And his Path was darkened before he was ever able to see the glory at the end. The Locked Gates of Heaven and the Gates of our own Paradise. May he rest in the reverent Light of our memories.”

“May he rest in our memories.” The gathered mourners repeated as they bowed their heads. On Hannibal’s right Margot sat with, she was always a touch dramatic, a short mourning veil tucked into the bun on the back of her head. It did make her look deliciously gothic paired with the mask of abject misery she wore accentuated by pouting wine red lips and thick liner around her verdant eyes. Momentarily, he devoured her with his eyes before he stood and gentled Darion back into his seat.

He looked at those gathered in the dining room and those that stood in the door with their heads now raised from their momentary grief. There were faces that he did not know personally. Those that he had mentored and helped to find their Path, his original outreach, had reached out to many others and brought them into their fold. Lost children and battered siblings like Margot and Darion, who sat close within each other's grip.

“Good evening.” He said and smiled gently, benevolently at those gathered with them. Looking out at them, he could see what their mouths would not articulate for fear of breaking their sacred silence. Their eyes were dark with hunger. Their eyes were bright with reverence. And while they were in no way, blind, mindless, trusting sheep, he was their shepherd and they waited patiently, adoringly for his next words. For the Rapture of connectivity.

“It is unfortunate that this night of celebration is shared with such darkness. Garrett Jacob Hobbs may not have been known to many of us but he was a man with incredible promise and potential. Perhaps though, Hobbs lent his light to our Darion who recently Harvested. He shared with the pig the same Exaltation that Hobbs gave his quarry, and her sacrifice of her life and her lungs has added light to Darion’s Path to the Gates.”

A murmur went through the room and drifted out into the hall much like the reverent chant of a parish mid-service.

“We are not however, here to celebrate one person.” He turned to his right and looked at the man sitting beside him. He was thin, slightly balding, and fidgeting nervously in a way that was most displeasing to Hannibal. But there was much more beyond the exterior that Hannibal could look over the presence the man exuded.

“Tonight we honor Eldon Stammets. Our brother and our friend. He is approaching his Becoming and has come across the first of many holes on his Path.” The silence was nearly complete if not for the sound of the house humming around them. It was holy, almost a consecration of the ground they shared. Enough to make it holy even in the eyes of the absent

God so many worshipped, the one to whom their pseudo-Abrahamic sacrifices called out to at the moment of their demise. It was beautiful.

“The FBI may be closing in on our brother but now is his time.” He looked at those gathered at his table and the ones in the room. Mrs. Komeda. Margot. Darion. Those he had honored with with his closeness looked on in quiet awe and gazed at Eldon with quiet praise. “But this is his Becoming and it will be an experience akin to all of ours. It will not be easy. It will not be smooth. And it will not be kind.”

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Just like Hannibal had said, Eldon Stammet’s Becoming had not been kind and now it would never be complete. She had not yet seen the thin, fidgety man but she knew from her scanner and word of mouth that Special Agent Will Graham had shot and wounded him. The circumstances weren’t clear and the confused chatter on her scanner wasn’t helping one bit but she did know that it involved Abigail Hobbs. The daughter of Garret Jacob Hobbs, rest his soul in the light.
Leola stood to the side as a few frantic nurses wheeled a panicking woman down the hall, her family following closely behind. This was an unfortunate event and they were going to be calling it a terrible accident in oversight and information leakage on the part of the F.B.I in the future.

It had not just affected Special Agent Will Graham and the unconscious Hobbs girl. The surrounding area would be panicked and on alert for some time afterwards until the shock of such an event eventually wore off. Which meant, on a side note, less hunting opportunities for Leola herself.

This had started because of that woman, Freddie Lounds. Her hands tightened at her side and she nodded as the elevator dinged and a handful of similar blue uniforms walked past her. She had gotten her grubby hands on information regarding Will Graham and his ‘talents’ as well as the current case. And because the woman didn’t seem to have any scope past that of the short term, particularly for her own gain, she had been unable to foresee the arrival of Stammets and the chaos that followed. Leola, herself, didn’t like the trembling, nervous man. He, in her eyes, didn’t have what it took to truly devote himself to Dr. Lecter and the Path. His mushroom garden had been all fine and dandy and provided them with a few tasty samples but beyond that, he was too lost in his own mind to truly give himself to the Path.

It was, as unpleasant as Leola found Stammets to be, unfortunate to see one of their own cut down from their Path with no way to advance in the foreseeable future. In any other circumstance she was sure that Dr. Lecter would’ve called them together for a somber drink and quiet contemplation. But this was not normal circumstance. Normal circumstances did not involve the F.B.I. and Stammets would have to go before he could tell anyone anything. Nothing would hurt the Light or Dr. Lecter. Not if she could stop it.

The laptop was in her car, wiped of all its memory. Any evidence leading to anyone of them involved would be destroyed completely. Eldon Stammets had acted alone. By himself in

delusional madness. And was unfortunately unguarded in his hospital room when an unknown assailant had shot and killed him in his hospital room. That would be the story played out in the news for the next two weeks and everyone, Dr. Lecter especially, would rest their heads knowing there was no more danger. With that in mind she picked up her radio and changed the frequency from the channels that would connect her to the local police dispatch.

“Officer Yarshef calling in confirmation for 217.”
“Confirmed.”

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“I didn't feel a sprig of zest when I shot Eldon Stammets.” Will said looking just to the right of Hannibal's head.

“You didn't kill Eldon Stammets.” Hannibal replied, on one hand confirming the other curious.

“I thought about killing him. I'm still not entirely sure that wasn't my intention pulling the trigger. But I don't have to worry about that. Someone beat me to it.”

“If your intention was to kill him, it's because you understand why he did the things he did and take back from him the power that he took from you.

It's beautiful in it's own way. Giving voice to the unmentionable.” Hannibal said. The other man was as usual skittish. Hannibal did not mind it too much, the casual rudeness of avoiding eye contact and the sudden often sharp biting sarcasm aimed the psychiatrists way, in place of the insight the man provided.

Will simply gave a bitter little laugh.
“I should have stuck to fixing boat motors in Louisiana.”

“A boat engine is a machine. A predictable problem, easy to solve. You fail, there's a paddle. Where was your paddle with Hobbs?”

“You're supposed to be my paddle.” Will looked at him and Hannibal provided him with a slight smile.

“I am. It wasn't the act of killing Hobbs that got you down, was it?” He watches the minute emotions crossing Wills face and resisted the urge to smile, wide and threatening. “Did you really feel so bad because killing him felt so good?”
It takes only a moment for the admission to flow from his lips.

“I liked killing Hobbs.”

Chapter End Notes

A 217 is police code for assault with intent to murder.

Chapter 6

Chapter by Ilikesugarinmytea

Chapter Summary

> For the second time that day, Hannibal found himself holding Darion back. This time however with much more force. He could feel the muscles of his shoulders straining beneath his hands and the sudden angry thrum of his heart beat. The boys ears were red and it was only because Hannibal was facing him that he saw the near feral snarl that graced Darions features. That his face, drawn in the stark lines of anger and outrage, were not privy to Miss Frederika Lounds. Rage that made him look like an avenging angel rather than a rabid animal or a mad man. It's an excuse he could and would use in the event that something occurred while his back was turned- which for future reference was the stupidity of Will Graham, frustrated and unchecked.

It was setting up to be quite a nice day. The sun shone gently through the house, its gentle rays a stark contrast to the tired blue sky of fall and the vibrant oranges and browns of the trees. It almost looked warm from where Hannibal stood, looking out the window onto the back lawn. There was nothing amiss and as it had been the day before the lawn was ordered and clear, prepared for the harsh and cold winter that would soon be following the falling leaves.

And while it appeared to be a warm day, they would not be able to stray out of doors for the simple pleasure of leisure. Hannibal turned from the window to look on at Darion and Osmund.

The two sat together, murmuring quietly to each other over a text book and a notebook full of notes. He would leave them to their studying for the next few hours before retrieving Darion for his lessons in Hannibal's mother tongue, Lithuanian. Perhaps, one day soon, he would take Darion to Castle Lecter with its ruined towers and overgrown forests. But not now. Not yet.

For now, he would leave them to their studying and properly entertain his guests who were patiently waiting for him in the kitchen. Or perhaps, he thought as he entered the kitchen, he would simply stand back as the ladies mingled. Margot stood by the sink. She wore a pantsuit the color of wine. Her hair had been pulled up into a severe bun and her lips were the color of blood. For all intent and purposes she looked like a witch caught up with the pleasures of the modern world or maybe even an enchantress who lured her victims in with the promise of power and riches. And Alana, in her simple yet well made grey suit, was her newest victim or perhaps a promising protégé.

“Good afternoon ladies.” He said, derailing their conversation. “I see no introductions on my part are necessary.”

“Not at all.” Alana said with a soft smile. She set her glass down on the counter and folded her hands over each other. “Miss Verger was just telling me about her family business.”

“Please call me Margot.” Margot replied with a smile Hannibal could only describe as lurid and a hand upon Alana’s arm. “I think that we will make fast friends.”

“I would hope you would.” Hannibal said, for a moment staring meaningfully at Margot’s delicate and painted hand. “I would like for two of my dear friends to get along.”

“And we will get along famously.” Margot said. Alana, to her credit, did not flush or stumble under the heated gaze that Margot was directing towards her.

“I hope so.” Alana replied and although her voice was calm her dark eyes seemed to laugh as they met Hannibal’s from beneath her thick lashes. “But I can’t stay for long. I’m lecturing in Quantico today and I’ve found that there’s no way for me to get out of it.”

“Then I hope you might be able to join us again.” Margot says with a smile. “At a time when you have more time. I would love to get to know you further.”

“And perhaps we can further discuss your proclivities.” Alana said with a polite smile directed to Margot.

“That would be delightful.” She replied and something hungry raced across the politely blank expanse of her face. “Until next time.”

And then like proper hosts, they saw her to the door.

“She is delightful.” Margot said as they watched Alana’s hybrid go around the corner.

“Indeed.” Hannibal agreed. “She has always been a pleasant woman. At Johns Hopkins, she was the most polite and attentive of my mentees and the only that made a lasting impression.”

“And obviously the prettiest,” Margot said in reply as the door began to close. “You are like a dragon Hannibal. Hoarding the shiniest things and the prettiest women to your side as if you would never want the world to view them.”

“If I must be a hoarding dragon then I shall not share you or Alana with the rest of the world.” He said as he began to close the door heedless of anything beyond the barrier of the door. “None shall view you for fear of my wrath and –

“Who is that in the driveway?” Margot asked. She peered under his arm at the intruder striding up the lawn towards them. “Were we entertaining multiple guests?

“No dearest, we were not.” Hannibal replied, stonily watching the man advancing up the lawn. “He was most certainly not invited.”

The stranger, distantly familiar to Hannibal, was tall, dark, and wearing an expression of asinine confidence on his face. If Tobias Budge had wanted to make a good impression, he should not have appeared outside of his scheduled appointment time. Or assumed that Hannibal would welcome him into his home with the charity and politeness he extended to his other guests. It seemed that Mr. Tobias Budge lacked an understanding of the business that Hannibal involved himself in and a basic grasp on good manners as well.

“Margot, dearest,” Hannibal said as he began to step outside. “I would like for you to inform Darion and Osmund that they should cease studying for the day. I think that they both need a break from the stresses of standard testing.”

He was sure she knew that he simply refused to expose Darion to the rudeness demonstrated by their uninvited guest.

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The next day was dreary and dark and found Hannibal removed from his practice. He had to cancel and recommend alternatives for several of his clients much to his dismay. While the majority of those who had to be rescheduled would be fine without him there were a few who may not fare as well as the others. The unfortunate circumstance would have to wait however. Jack Crawford was once again angry and all things must be put aside for him.

“I have 7 families waiting, let me rephrase, demanding that we find whatever’s left of their daughters. Abigail Hobbs is the only person I can ask who might know the truth.” He glowered at Hannibal and Alana although Hannibal noted there was extra poison in his glare when it swiveled over his colleague.

“You can’t ask her right now. We have to create a safe place for her first or you won’t get any answers.” Alana replied but it was apparent that Jack did not much care for her answer.

“I respect your sympathy for her, Doctor Bloom. One day I hope you’ll appreciate my lack of it. Only body we found is the one Hobbs didn’t eat. 7 bodies. 7 girls.”

“7 sisters, in Abigail’s mind. When she learns of her father’s crimes.” Hannibal included finally drawing Jacks wrath filled gaze.

“May already know about them. Her DNA’s all over his slaughterhouse.” The room seemed to pause and stutter as the words left Jack's mouth. Hannibal kept his face an empty mask although he could see the beginnings of disbelief on Alana’s patiently blank face.

“You really think Abigail helped her father kill those girls?” She asked.

“It is one possibility that needs to be ruled out. If she didn’t help her father, she may know who did.” Jack replied although, from his tone, it sounded like he had already convinced himself of Abigail’s guilt.

“How was Abigail?” Hannibal asked Alana. Unfortunately in all of his visits, with and without Darion in tow, Abigail had not stirred. He had questions for her, about her father, about her knowledge of his acquaintances and activities. All things he needed to know in order to determine the threat she posed to him. “When you saw her?”

“Surprisingly practical.” Alana replied with a sigh in her voice.

“Suspiciously practical?” Jack would obviously not let the girl alone.

“I would suggest she can be practical without being a murderer.” Hannibal supplied.

“I think she’s hiding something.” Alana continued.

“It may simply be her trauma.”

“Yes. Could also be more. She has a penchant for manipulation, withheld information to gain information. She demonstrated only enough emotions to prove she had them.” Alana explained and Hannibal couldn't help the curiosity that rose up in him.

“Appreciating my lack of sympathy?” There was a certain amount if gloating in Jack's tone which Alana put down with her next words.

“Providing psychological evaluation.”

“You said it may be more than trauma yet you question her involvement in the murders her father committed.” Hannibal said to keep the conversation in the direction of Abigail Hobbs and not their opposing ideological positions.

“What I’m questioning is her state of mind. She repeated something I said when she was... unconscious.” Alana said pulling her eyes away from Jack to look at Hannibal. The fluorescent light of Jack's office was bounced off her eyes as if they were brown marbles.

“Leading you to believe she wasn’t.” Jack prodded.

“Leading me to believe it was odd.” She replied with finality.

“It is odd, but not unheard of for the comatose or anesthetized to recall word for word conversations that took place in their presence.” Hannibal supplied once again receiving the quite ire of Jack's gaze.

“I want Will Graham to talk to her.” He said as if his words were law and they would simply bend to his will.

“Jack. Not yet.” Alana, Hannibal could tell, wanted to hit the man across from them. Hannibal understood the sentiment.

“Doctor Bloom, you’re not Will’s psychiatrist. Doctor Lecter is.”

“For intents and purposes, yes, but I’m not entirely objective on this. Will and I share a compassion for Abigail Hobbs, we saved her life.”

“Then who better to create a safe place for her to answer questions.” Jack said. The smile forming on his face was the one worn by petulant children who had won their way by sheer emotional attrition against their parents. As Hannibal assumed, nothing would dissuade Jack from getting what he wanted.

“Then I hope you won't mind me asking that Darion accompany us to question Abigail Hobbs?”

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It’s early afternoon when Hannibal arrives per agreement to Will Graham's farmland home in Wolf Trap. It was empty and, likely during the winter, takes on the appearance of a frozen tundra. Quite a nice place for a man like Will Graham to have a place that so emphatically displays his desire for space and contemplation.

“There's nothing here.” Darion said looking out the passenger window. “Someone could scream and no one would hear them.”

“Isolation in the extreme.” Hannibal agreed as he pulled into Will's driveway. “Would you come with to retrieve Mr. Graham?”

It took very little time for Graham to come to the door, dressed in a suit that was obviously store bought and slightly too large for him. When he looked to Darion to greet him, a smile, rises as if he is meeting an old friend and then is replaced by a look of suspicious surprise. It runs across Will’s usually quiet and morose face before it was quickly swallowed back in from wherever it had come.

“I suppose that this is your father.” Will said, his eyes trailing from Darion to Hannibal and then back again. There was a certain wariness about him as if he expected one of them to suddenly jump for the exposed column of his neck. “Otherwise you wouldn't be here on my doorstep.”

Darion, however, was not to be discouraged by Wills usual dourness and with a flushing smile said, “Good morning Mr. Graham. It's good to see you again.”

“It’s nice to see you too.” He replied although his smile has dimmed slightly. They walked to the car an almost awkward silence and as Hannibal waited for Will to break it, he watched Darion and the pleased flush on his face. “Are you dropping him to school? Or -”

“Darion is accompanying us today. To see Miss Hobbs.” Hannibal informed him as they all slid into the Bently. “I assure you that it is all above board with Jack.”

Will made a scoffing sound that informed Hannibal that he did not particularly care much about what Jack had assured or wanted.

“I’m just surprised that Darion might want to hang around with us. I was under the impression that teenagers discarded the attentions of anyone older than twenty five for more interesting pursuits.”

At that Darion laughed. “If that were the case, I don’t think I would find my father half as interesting as I already do.”

“Darion was concerned about the wellbeing of Miss Hobbs, having come with me to see her many times.” Hannibal said as they began the drive. “And he is eager to see an F.B.I agent at work. He begged to go and would’ve made himself insufferable if he had been barred from this outing.”

“Is that so?” Will murmured, looking up into the rearview mirror Darion, who was smiling impishly with the knowledge that he could and would have driven his father up the wall with little annoyances in petty retaliation.

“I find myself well versed in the arts of petty, childish warfare.” He said and surprisingly, that drew a laugh out of the usually pensive and quiet Will Graham. “I might share my tactics but then that would take away my element of surprise.”

“It would wouldn’t it.” Will stated and turned halfway in his seat. “Then we should talk about something else to protect your secrets and pass the time.”

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The jovial mood that had been established in the car had been irreparably damaged. Will Graham walked before him supporting Abigail Hobbs. She was, as they say, weak as a kitten from her three weeks of a medically induced coma. Her eyes were bright though and her skin flushed from much needed blood flow. Will however, was as morose as ever and Darion, who Hannibal kept close to him with a discrete hand around his wrist, seemed ready to go lunging after Miss Lounds.

And as much as Hannibal dislikes the woman, there was no need to make a spectacle in the middle of the day. He only removed his hand when Abigail sat down and he was sure that Darion, with his face now a soft pink, will not go dashing off to mete out justice for the stain upon Will Graham’s honor.

There was a long moment of silence after Abigail sat down. Will sat opposite her, his jaw working as he tried to find the right words through the guilt at the pleasure he found in her father’s murder. Darion tried not to stare at her but there is curiosity on both sides as she looked over the wild curls of Will’s head, bowed in quiet, sorrowful supplication. “I’m sorry we couldn’t save your mother. We did everything we could, but she was already gone.”

“I know. I saw him kill her.” Abigail said, her voice soft and unsure. She looked away from Darion and attached her gaze to something solid and inanimate as if she could hide her unshed tears.

“You saw it?” Hannibal asked.

“It was sort of like seeing it.”

“There was no vocabulary for your mind to articulate the violence.” Hannibal assured.

“Didn’t seem real.” Abigail said, now focusing her blue green eyes on him. “He was loving right up until the second he wasn’t. He kept telling me he was sorry and to just hold still. He was going to make it all go away.”

“There was plenty wrong with your father, Abigail, but there’s nothing wrong with you. You said he was loving. I believe it. That’s what you brought out in him.” Will said with incredible emotion in his voice.

“It’s not all I brought out in him.” She mumbled and touched her bandage through her scarf.

“Did he tell you about the young women he murdered?” Hannibal asked and ignored the glance that Graham gave him. Chastising. Irritation.

“You don’t have to answer that right now, if you don’t want to.”

“But we will have to ask you those questions eventually.” Hannibal insisted.

“I’m going to be messed up, aren’t I? I’m worried about nightmares.” Abigail continued to play with her scarf with trembling fingers.

“There’s no such thing as getting used to what you experienced. It bothers me a lot. I can only imagine how it bothers you when I see it over and over in my mind.” Will said and his voice trembled with the emotion. “I worry about nightmares, too.”

The confession, that was what it was, though not as much as his admission of pleasure not a few days ago, pulls Abigail's eyes from the floor. “Do you have nightmares about killing my dad?”

“Sometimes it’s hard for me to dream about much else.”

“Killing somebody, even if you have to do it, it feels that bad?” She asked and there was soft confusion in her voice.

“Ugliest thing in the world.”

Hannibal eyed Will. He was not telling the truth. Hannibal knows he felt pleasure in taking Hobb’s life. That he enjoyed watching the blood flow from his wounds and the life fade from his eyes. The power that came with taking another life. The ability to play God.

Very quietly after a moment of contemplation, Abigail says “I want to go home.”

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For the second time that day, Hannibal found himself holding Darion back. This time however with much more force. He could feel the muscles of his shoulders straining beneath his hands and the sudden angry thrum of his heart beat. The boys ears were red and it was

only because Hannibal was facing him that he saw the near feral snarl that graced Darions features. That his face, drawn in the stark lines of anger and outrage, were not privy to Miss Frederika Lounds. Rage that made him look like an avenging angel rather than a rabid animal or a mad man. It's an excuse he could and would use in the event that something occurred while his back was turned- which for future reference was the stupidity of Will Graham, frustrated and unchecked.

"It's not very smart to piss off a guy who thinks about killing people for a living." Jack quoted and from his expression it seemed that he was infinitely irritated, though that acrid glare would rest on Hannibal soon enough.

"You were there with him and you let those words come out of his mouth."

"I trust Will to speak for himself." Hannibal supplied and minutely enjoyed the muted anger on the other man's face.

"I'm just happy the story wasn't about Abigail Hobbs." Alana muttered and Jack was in no way pleased.

"Then it's a victory." He said with a sigh. "Abigail Hobbs wants to go home. Let's take Abigail Hobbs home."

"What Abigail wants and what she needs are two different things. Taking her out of a controlled environment would be reckless." Alana explained and Hannibal admired her bullheadedness in the face of Jack Crawford.

It was here that Hannibal momentarily tuned out the conversation, listening only with half an ear. Darion was now at home under the watchful eye of Osmund and Jessamyn, who had taken her vigil after Margot had left. He had been quiet enough leaving the car with Graham in it but once in the house, away from Graham's sullen gaze and dramatic scowl, he had transformed. So much so that he had to have Osmund...curb his enthusiastic response with a mild sedative. Once he was fully conscious and aware of his actions, Hannibal hoped that there would be no major struggle in order to keep him home.

"Doctor Lecter?" Jack pulled him from his mind.

"Doctor Bloom is right, but there is a scenario where revisiting the trauma event could help Abigail heal and actually prevent denial."

"We have a difference of opinion," Jack said but it was clear what was coming next. "therefore I'm choosing the opinion that best serves my agenda."

Without a doubt, they would be going to Minnesota post haste.

Chapter 7

Chapter by MostArdentlyYours

Chapter Summary

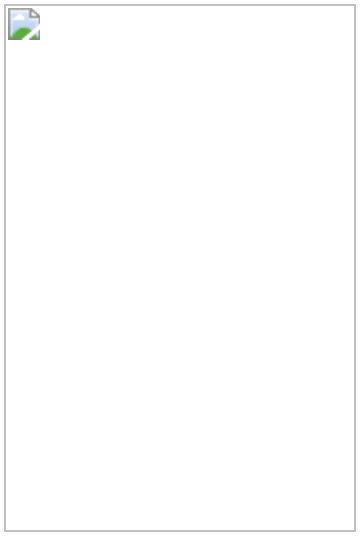
Abigail turned away from Will, redirecting her steely gaze at Darion, its silent castigation equal in its reckoning.

The boy returned her look with his own steadfast gaze, though noticeably gentler, and less demanding. Abigail was suddenly struck with the memory of her first hunt with her father, when she lined a spring doe in the crosshairs of her rifle, watching the little thing's head turn towards her, its eyes curious. She noticed its long lashes, tips gently curling towards the skies, as it blinked slowly, blissfully unaware. Its gaze held a sense of unadulterated ingenuousness and she was simultaneously afraid... and envious.

Chapter Notes

Hey Guys! We are back! The plot is really going to start veering off course soon so be prepared! Keep us informed with your opinions and speculations! :)

Below is a picture of how we imagine Darion to look. The actor is Kyle Allen and he plays the character Hawk in Goldberg's show The Path.



"Come on it's Friday night what else could you be doing?"

“No”

“Saturday then.”

“Changing the day isn’t gonna change my decision Jimmy.”

Will couldn’t have finished stuffing his lecture notes into his bag any faster. When he saw Price wander into his classroom towards the end of the period, he knew he’d have to book it to his car if he was going to escape another half-hour of Jimmy’s prodding. The man had been coaxing Will into going out for a drink with the rest of the forensics team for days now, and Will would rather have strangled himself before admitting that he was slowly being worn down.

“Is it because of Zeller? Look, I get it. He and Bev had a hostile situation going on for a little while too. I took them to get shitfaced and now they're going to poetry slams together.”

“No it’s not,” Will tried to shuffle out from behind his desk, only for Price to sidestep right into his path of escape. He sighed, “I’m just not into the whole bar and club experience.”

“It’s one evening with your coworkers without Father Crawford breathing down our necks!”

Will’s cell rang, and he groaned as the devil himself popped up on his caller ID, “I highly doubt it,” he muttered under his breath, answering with a curt, “Yes Jack?”

Price fixed him with a pleading look, as Will brushed past him, heading towards Crawford’s office in preparation for a meeting with Alana and Hannibal. Turning his head towards the man, Will mouthed, “Not happening,” before quickly effecting his retreat.

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It was a Sunday evening, when a light drizzle had groomed the Maryland sky into a dreary grey, that the well-worn Baltimore roads found a sleek black Bentley braking on their crumbling asphalt to turn into the small parking lot of the Port Haven Psychiatric Facility. The dark beast purred to a stop, headlights briefly illuminating droplets of rain accumulated on the welcoming sign before it blinked and was extinguished as a quick twist of keys killed the engine. The square fell into a brief moment of silence, oddly accentuated by the steady pitter of gentling rain on the vehicle’s hood, before the click of the car door inspired vivacity back into the scene.

Darion Lector, clad casually elegant in a crisp black button down, layered beneath a grey knitted blazer and a dark blue scarf stepped out into the chilled air. Flipping his collar up against the rain, he reached inside the car to retrieve a small brown paper bag, quickly shielding it from the drizzle by tucking it under his jacket. He took care not to smudge the neat calligraphy sporting the name Abigail Hobbs on the corner of the package as he hurried inside the building.

The door to Abigail's room echoed with a knock three times before she bid the visitor to enter, and she blinked with surprise at the slightly damp mane of curls that came lilting in.

“Hello Abigail, I’m Darion. We met last week.”

“I remember you,” She said slowly, then fell silent, letting it linger for just half a second too long for the boy to become acquainted with discomfort. When Darion opened his mouth as if to speak, she continued, “What brings you here?”

Thrown off kilter for a moment, he paused before answering, “My father wanted to drop off some homemade sweets and thought it would be nice for me to do it... since we’re the same age and all.”

He produced the paper package from beneath his jacket as he made his way to the bed. Abigail set aside the book she was reading and accepted the brown bag, noting the neat cursive looping out her name. Carefully she unfolded the high-quality paper to peek inside. There were two aluminum trays of tarts stacked neatly and with care to not disturb the intricate placement of glazed fruits atop each one.

“Mind if I sit?” Darion asked, as he shed his scarf, wrapping it loosely about his hand.

She looked back at him, nodding. He let her gaze wander over his mop of curls and gentling brown eyes, nothing like the piercing amber hue that his claimed predecessor had.

“Don’t take offense, but I find it hard to believe your Dr. Lector’s blood kin.”

“You are correct. I am adopted,” Darion drew out a nearby chair, “the proverbial orphan jumping from foster home to foster home. Ever the ill-fitting puzzle piece and untamable flame, until now of course.”

Abigail's fingers twisted a small crinkle into the tart bag, finally deducing the reason for the boy’s presence during the last visit with Graham and Lecter and his follow-up today. She wondered if it was Dr. Lector’s idea to prescribe his adopted son as a soothing balm to the loss of her parents or… She fixed Darion with an accusing stare. Perhaps it’s the boy who wants to build a reputation for himself, curious to see if he could be the one to piece her back together, reignite her flame. She allowed her next words to fall curt and with venom from her tongue.

“Probably says something about you.”

If he noticed her change in tone, Darion didn’t allow a pause in the flow of the conversation to acknowledge it.

“Probably does, if anything I’ve channeled my proclivities for burning bridges into torching creme brulees,” He quipped.

Abby turned away from his smile, “Didn’t take you to be the baking type.”

“I wasn’t aware you’d have to fit a “type” in order to enjoy working with sugar.”

She shrugged, turning to the bag of tarts, “You do if you’re into making something as time consuming and ostentatious as a creme brulee.”

She startled at Darion's sudden laugh. He tipped his head forward only slightly and in such a way that conveyed sincerity as he giggled. It was just short enough to be bashful and reached a such a pitch to be contagious. He assented with an amused cough, "I suppose you're right." Abigail used the time it took for her to lift one of the fruit tarts from the bag to remind herself of her enmity towards the boy.

She studied the small treat at eye-level, noticing small irregularities about the surface of its crust that added to its hand-made aesthetic. Other than that, it looked like something that came out of a five-star restaurant; its yellow creme base almost buried beneath an elegant display of crystallized berries.

"Fan of O'Connor?"

Abigail glanced back at Darion's face, his neck tilted at an awkward angle in order to read the cover of her opened book laid upside down on the side of her bed. She cupped the small tart in one hand and brought it to her lap as she spoke, "Dr. Bloom… left it. Thought I'd just skim through."

Rather, Dr. Bloom had… conveniently misplaced it in Abby's ward one day after a visit. She hadn't picked up on her loss yet, and Abigail didn't mention it.

"May I?"

At her shrug, Darion picked up the book, flipping it over to the page she left off on. He smiled after quickly skimming a few sentences, "Ah, A Good Man's Hard to Find! How do you like it?"

Abigail refused to meet his all too candid eyes, and began picking at the little tart in her hand, "So far? I'm not sure. I'd be disappointed if the grandmother meets any other end than one fit for a 'proper lady.'"

Darion laughed again, short and lilting. Abigail would've ripped her own throat out before admitting that a small part of her was hoping to have prompted it.

"It's... debatable."

She raised an eyebrow in question, but he wouldn't be coaxed into spoiling anymore of the story. She sighed, "Oh well, never liked southern gothic that much anyways."

Darion hummed, "I understand, its aimed at a specific region's crazy."

"Yet it speaks to you?"

"It does less speaking than it does flaying. I'll never know how the Assyrians felt as they were skinned alive but I'd imagine that O'Connor brings me one step closer." He paused, then smiled shyly ducking his head, "Though I'll admit that the true reason I was lured into this genre was upon finding out that she'd taught a chicken to walk backwards."

For the first time in the weeks since she woke up, the beginnings of a sincere smile threatened to part Abigail's lips. She resumed picking at the tart, finding it hard to parse self-

indulging intent in this blatantly ingenuous nerd.

He handed the book back to her, continuing, “Wanted to try it for myself but, my home’s not really a friendly area for poultry.”

The image of Darion attempting to coax a stubborn rooster into preforming parlor tricks was constructed ridiculously easy in Abigail’s mind. She couldn’t imagine him succeeding, the birds had their pride after all, but she couldn’t imagine him really caring either way.

She returned her attention to the small treat cupped in her palm. Noticing how her grip was crinkling a few crumbs from its crust. She lifted it up again, “Don’t tell me these tarts were your doing.”

“I must disappoint you then,” Darion smiled.

She took a bite.

“You’re shitting me.”

“I’d prefer not to be.”

A light breath of air, suspiciously close to a laugh, escaped between her teeth. Abigail took another bite, asking through the perfectly balanced sweet tang, “How did you learn to do this?”

“My father taught me, though he enjoys caramelizing ham more so than fruit.”

“Damn...well what can I say? They’re amazing.” Abigail finished the small tart off, licking the crumbs off her palm

“I’m flattered,” Darion’s head ducked forward once again, and Abigail caught a glimpse of a flushed ear protruding from the back of his curls.

She wondered if his hair felt as soft as it looked. Thin and light, so unlike her stubbornly straight dark brown. She’d have to wrestle with a curling iron for hours to coax the thick strands into a single sad curl and even then, their life expectancy remained frustratingly short. She contemplated at what would happen if she took a straightener to his hair. If the mane would rebel, fight her with every bundled curl. If cropped, she wondered if the strands would feel as soft as a doe’s hide.

Blowing out a breath of air, she set the tarts on the bedside table, “So, I guess we’re supposed to play best pals now?”

“Not at all. If you feel uncomfortable with my presence just let me know, and I won’t come bother you again.”

She snorted, “Am I so uninteresting?”

It was meant to be a joke, but perhaps her voice tread too lightly on the sarcasm. Darion’s next words came out somewhat tinted with worry, “I apologize. That was not my intention. I

do enjoy talking with you. I just don't want to make you feel obligated to indulge me."

She studied him, head crocked contemplatively. He held her gaze with no hesitation.

"Yeah, I can see how you were raised by Dr. Lector."

She watched confusion bloom rosy on his cheeks, "R-really?"

Snorting she continued, "You have his same refined stickler air about you. I bet you've never cussed or smoked or done stupid shit like guys our age would do."

Relaxing at the note of amusement tinting her voice, Darion didn't miss a beat to the banter, "You would be correct, though if it may offer some solace, I have partaken of the spirits."

She scoffed, but it was overdramatized and silly, "You? Really?"

"Made a few myself as a matter of fact."

"Oh, look at you a well-rounded connoisseur. And your dad permits you?"

Darion's grin was full of teeth, "My father encourages it."

"Well its refined in its own sense so I can see why he would."

Leaning back into his chair, Darion allowed the easy flow of conversation to run its course, smiling at Abigail's quick-witted remarks, "I'm glad you think so."

It's interesting how these things like friendships work. You could know someone for years and never reach the level of intimate knowledge and companionship that Abigail shared with Darion in one week. They'd exchanged numbers before he'd left that day and he was in and out of her room so often afterwards, that it was impossible for him to not to run into Jack and Will and Alana on multiple occasions, all of whom were left with an extremely positive impression of their encounter with the boy each time. Even the hospital staff were enamored with Darion's affable wit and occasionally bouts of charming shyness. It got to a point where a few well-placed words from Abigail and a glance at her accomplice's pout could get a nurse to allow the two of them free reign of the hospital grounds without supervision. When they (mostly at Darion's insistence) continued to abide by the rules, their privileges continued to extend.

By the end of the week, even Jack was thoroughly convinced that Darion would be a beneficial and grounding presence for Abigail in the face of her old demons, and it didn't take much coaxing from Hannibal and Alana to worm an approval from the man, allowing Darion to accompany her when they took Abigail back home to Minnesota.

Will had just gotten out of the aforementioned meeting, Alana and Hannibal having a small debate behind him over the pros of allowing Abigail to return home, when he spotted Price strolling down the opposite hallway, hands thrust deeply in his lab coat. Will made ready to bolt, when Hannibal's voice rang out, "What is your opinion on this matter Will?"

Will tried to keep his internal monologue of curses clear from his facial expression as he turned back to the two, “There’s nothing to make of it now, we’re going regardless, Jack’s bent on it.”

“Yes, but it doesn’t mean that Abigail won’t be suffering the repercussions of this for the rest of her life!” Alana protested, prompting a sympathetically dissenting rebuttal from Hannibal. Will watched the two bicker for a little while, and wondered why he parsed covert intimacy in the two’s overtly professional back and forth. A growing bile of something angry and vulnerable crept up his throat, and it took him a while to label the confused clenches in his heartstrings as jealousy. It was absurd. Alana had just hinted to him a few weeks ago about seeing another woman. At this point, Will had long crushed any sprig of hope he had left for rekindling something between he and her and took the news fairly mildly, nothing that a few fingers of whiskey and Winston’s solemn presence couldn’t fix.

He looked to Hannibal arguing with restrained passion for a daughter that wasn’t his and would never be. Will understood that feeling of responsibility. He had protected Abigail from Hobbs, but it was Hannibal that had saved her life. Her well-being afterwards, was a unique burden they both shared. Will agreed with Alana about keeping Abigail away from the Hobb’s house, but he suddenly felt inclined to defend Hannibal. Something about Alana trying to dictate Abigail's next steps when she couldn’t possibly understand what the two of them have been through... just didn’t sit well in his stomach.

Will made an earnest attempt to politely leave the two to their deliberations, and, after rounding the next corner he honestly thought he was home free. That was, until a light pat on his back made him nearly jump out of his skin.

“Hey Will! Okay I thought about what you said about the bar. We don't have to do bar! I talked to Zeller, and he’ll be more than happy to host it at his house. How’s that sound?”

“No,” Will began making his way down the hallway, though his acceleration was hindered when Price jovially threw an arm around his shoulder.

“Look, you said Zeller wasn’t the problem last time, but I have a feeling that he may be. I’m telling you all it’s gonna take is 2 shots of tequila, and he’ll be doing handstands and singing La Marseillaise…Well, he’ll attempt to.” Brian smirked.

“For the last time Price, it’s not Zeller. And plus, next week Jack’s flying us out to Minnesota.”

“The week after then, when you all return.”

Will sighed, “How long are you going to keep this up?”

Brian shot him a sheepish smile, “How bout this. One time. Just one time come drinking with us and I’ll never utter a word again.”

Will let the offer roll around in his brain, before finally deciding that the pros did, however marginally, outweigh the cons, “Fine. But it’ll have to be the weekend after I get back.”

“Perfect!” To describe Brian’s mood as ecstatic would be giving too much credit to the word, “I’ll hold you to it.” A good-humored clap on Will’s back and the man was off, like a Hermes on the run.

***

Will almost wanted to demand Lector to turn the rental car around when he saw the word “Cannibals” scrawled on the garage the door and windows of the now abandoned Hobb’s residence. He knew things would only get worse from there. Abigail’s mood had progressively darkened as the trip went on. She was solemn on the car ride over to begin with, and though Darion managed to coax an occasional laugh from her he didn’t even try to prompt her to smile during her exploration of the house.

Will felt the hairs on the back of his neck prickle with unease at the unrelenting stare Abigail fixed him with when she asked, “How did it feel like? To be my father?”

He answered as best he could, eyes haunted, “It feels like… I’m talking to his shadow suspended on dust.”

“Even after you killed him,” It was detachedly stated, grounded on resent.

Will could not have met her eyes even if he wanted to, “Maybe even because I killed him.”

The room fell quiet for just a tad too long to be conventionally acceptable. Light from the windows left an angry glare on the white backs of family photos on the fridge. Happy lost faces set turned away from the four of them held silently inert between stoves that used to pop and sizzle and cupboards that used used to creak and slam. In a sudden agitation of the shadows and dust, Darion moved forward to tap Abigail on the shoulder, his voice mild, “You mentioned that there was a stream behind the house? That you used to play in it as a kid?”

Abigail turned away from Will, redirecting her steely gaze at Darion, its silent castigation equal in its reckoning, “It’s all dried up now.”

The boy returned her look with his own steadfast gaze, though noticeably gentler, and less demanding. Abigail was suddenly struck with the memory of her first hunt with her father, when she lined a spring doe in the crosshairs of her rifle, watching the little thing’s head turn towards her, its eyes curious. She noticed its long lashes, tips gently curling towards the skies, as it blinked slowly, blissfully unaware. Its gaze held a sense of unadulterated ingenuousness and she was simultaneously afraid... and envious. Overwhelmed, she averted her eyes, their unmitigated fury momentarily extinguished.

“I think I should still like to see it, if you’d be willing to show me?”

She nodded and motioned for Darion to follow. Alana looked like she was on the verge of saying something, but ultimately decided to let the two be. They left the kitchen without so much as a second glance.

***

The three chaperones ended up picking through leftover evidence boxes alone, shrouded in a comfortable silence. Will reflected on Abigail's question and his hesitant response. Shadows and dust that rested stagnant and exposed stagnation. Who was he kidding. Garret Jacob Hobbs had transcended such forms even before the first bullet shattered his trachea. He thrived on the neck of Abigail, in the stench of a bleached kitchen, in the nightmares of Will Graham.

“Can you catch someone’s crazy?” Will muttered sardonically, drawing the attention of a pair of analytical gazes.

“Folie a deux. A French psychiatric term. Madness shared by two.” Alana stated, watching him, worried.

Hannibal’s voice broke in mildly but held a kind regard, “One can not be delusional if the belief in question is accepted as ordinary by others in that person’s culture or subculture. Or family.”

Will looked up to Hannibal’s reassuring smile then quickly averted his gaze. He found himself drawn to the man’s shirt collar, noting for some weird reason in the back of his mind that it belonged to the same cashmere sweater he’d witnessed the first time his eyes roamed over Hannibal’s prominence almost 3 months ago. Will returned flipping through an inventory of the Hobb’s house, pondering the complexities or perhaps simple fickleness of time and friendships. He’d known Jack and Alana for years but they to have done nothing but to slowly pull them apart, and now, in a span of a few months he was going out for drinks with a forensics team that he barely knew and has confided a damning secret to his psychiatrist.

He peered at Hannibal from the corner of his eye, watching the man stand to retrieve another box from the stack beside the fireplace. Alana, who was reaching for a file of papers teetering on a shelf above, suddenly stumbled forward, her hand accidentally brushing the pile of loose leafs in the process. With almost inhuman reflexes and grace, Hannibal quickly stepped forward, catching both the file and the woman in one calculated move. It was a performance that for many would be celebrated as a fortunate stroke of luck, but for Hannibal Lector it could not be mistaken for anything other than honed kinesthetic intelligence. How the man came to acquire such familiarity with the effect of physics on his body, was unquestioned. Will was struck, not for the first time, by how little he knew of Hannibal’s backstory.

Alana’s laugh was charmingly embarrassed as she extracted herself from Hannibal’s embrace, a small flush coloring the ends of her cheeks, at Hannibal’s polite quip about a similar incident that happened when they first met. Will looked back down to his inventory, fighting a confused boiling in the pit of his stomach.

“Leave her alone!”

The three of them froze as Daron’s voice rang out with a rage so disparate to his usual gentle tenor. Dr. Lector was the first one up and sprinting towards the back of the house, Alana and Will catching up quickly behind him.

“Piss off!”

Will rounded the corner just in time to see a rock the size of a fist hurling towards a young red-haired boy slinking behind a small oak. By some preternatural machination, the stone sang past his short curls, just barely missing his scalp. In some cruel universe, it may have made contact, tearing blood and skin. Will fixed his attention on the pitcher, finding a young brown-haired teen standing adjacent to the struggling tangle that Abagail Hobbs and Darion Lector had gotten themselves into.

Abigail was pulling at Darion's arm as he strained towards the quickly disappearing form sprinting into the woods. The left sleeve of his coat hung limply at his right shoulder, evidently stripped off during Abigail's struggle to restrain Darion in his attempts confront the other boy; her chilled fingers finding purchase in his red sweater beneath, twisting two handfuls of wrinkles into the soft fabric.

"Who was that?" Will called out as Alana surged towards the trio inquiring after their well-being. Amid all the confusing questioning and initial pursuit that ensued. No one noticed anything off when Hannibal strode up to Darion, placing a gentle but firm grip on his shoulder and carefully angled his body away from the others as he requested for details of the occurrence.

That was how they came to be acquainted with the face of Marissa Schurr. Brown hair and grey eyes too perceptive for her own good. She affirmed Abigail's and Darion's detailing of what happened, her gaze flickering a few times more than conventional, over to the boy, who was standing a few feet behind everyone else, hands stuffed deep into his jacket pockets. After some questioning they deduced the identity of this mysterious agitator to be none other than the brother of Cassie Boyle, the Copycat Killer's latest victim.

And this was how they came to be acquainted with the face of Nicholas Boyle. The next time they would see it, would be months later in an abandoned field a few miles off of Bloomington. Its eyelids would be shut, burdened beneath a thick layer of frozen blood.

Of the present trio, only two of them would be able to confirm it to be the face of a murderer.

Chapter 8

Chapter by Ilikesugarinmytea

Chapter Summary

> As if he were waiting for the invitation, Will Graham deflated with the grace of a dying elk. His descent into the chair was painfully magnificent and his surrender to the pressures of the human world were so unlike the pitiful belting of his many patients. No, beside Alana who was wringing her fingers in an unusual display of distress, Will seemed to glow from within. He was no doubt harried by thoughts concerning Miss Hobbs and Jack Crawford. It was painted onto the contours of his face in loving, haggard strokes. His worry for Abigail colored the grey circles beneath his eyes. His back cracked beneath the weight of Agent Crawford's expectations and demands that, although silent here in this hotel room, echoed as if in a cave. It was fascinating yet painful to watch Will like this. He was crumbling in on himself and still trying, desperately, to share those shattering pieces with others. What a foolishly selfless man.

Chapter Notes

> Hello again everyone! So so sorry for the long absence but we are back and hopefully updating regularly from now on! We hope you enjoy and comment.

Dusk had already fallen when Will and Alana entered his room. Their faces were grey with fatigue. Their smiles were sharp grimaces and unconsciously their shoulders were bent beneath the weight of the world on their shoulders. Their effort to hide it from Hannibal was a valiant if tragic struggle. There was no way anyone of them could have escaped the events of the day without any emotional or physical wounds. Darion's scraped hands came to mind. Livid and red and the furthest thing from his mind as the boy kept trying to break free from Hannibal. His handsome face had been gnarled and marred by the disruptive roots of fury and indignation. Anger triggered by an event that could have very easily been resolved without violence. Or ended very quickly with a broken neck. It was unfortunate that violence always tinged the edges of his perfect delineation with specks of red and black and blue. The day had been trying on all of them though and it was now that Hannibal had the chance to mitigate and explain away the damage. In the twilight hours of Minneapolis meant for silence and respite, they would return to equilibrium.

"Please, sit." Hannibal said long after the door clicked shut behind them. He let a smile rise to his lips to comfort them in their moment of crisis. "I think we might all need a drink."

As if he were waiting for the invitation, Will Graham deflated with the grace of a dying elk. His descent into the chair was painfully magnificent and his surrender to the pressures of the human world were so unlike the pitiful belting of his many patients. No, beside Alana who was wringing her fingers in an unusual display of distress, Will seemed to glow from within. He was no doubt harried by thoughts concerning Miss Hobbs and Jack Crawford. It was painted onto the contours of his face in loving, haggard strokes. His worry for Abigail colored the grey circles beneath his eyes. His back cracked beneath the weight of Agent Crawford's expectations and demands that, although silent here in this hotel room, echoed as if in a cave. It was fascinating yet painful to watch Will like this. He was crumbling in on himself and still trying, desperately, to share those shattering pieces with others. What a foolishly selfless man.

Will, Hannibal knew, would appreciate the simplicity of a neat whiskey. He personally was not a fan of it, so to speak. The brown liquid often burned his throat in an unpleasant fashion and left his mouth tasting of turpentine or old leather. It had however become a staple of their increasingly casual Friday sessions and had a calming effect on Will that Hannibal found simply fascinating. It supposedly 'quieted' his mind, Will's way of softening the frightening edges of his mind when they began to cut too deep or draw too much blood. More so than the worrying amount of aspirin his unofficial patient seemed intent on consuming.

Alana, on the other hand, would prefer something sweet in place of her usual beer. Her tastes and preferences had long ago been filed away in his head from their shared days at Johns Hopkins. Her tastes in liquor had not changed much since then. Her preferences and proclivities had. Margot, he thought, had not been quite so delighted with life as she was with the attentions of Alana Bloom. This romance of theirs would not last for very long however. Not because Margot would lose interest but because Alana would not be able to adapt. And would most likely not see reason too.

"How is Miss Hobbs faring tonight Will?" Hannibal focused once again on Will. His eyes were downcast, focused distantly on some spot of imaginary dirt on the toes of his shoes. He did not answer the first time. Nor the second time. Or the third. The glasses were beginning to condensate in his hands. "William?"

"Yes?"

"I fear today that today's trauma has not only affected our charges. I feared that Abigail has had borne the brunt of it but it seems that we have all been affected. Perhaps we should all rest from this unfortunate excitement?"

“I am on the on the far side of exhaustion Doctor.” Will replied, raising his eyes from his shoes with a tired sigh. “Abigail is...is shaken. A little horrified and haunted by the feeling of liability for an event that was inexplicably linked to her but completely out of her control. She will be okay with time but she’s resting now. The storm might give her a sense of peace. At least we won’t have to subject her to Jack immediately on her return. Thank you Doctor.” Their fingers brushed as they facilitated an exchange of glasses and he could not help but be distracted by the texture of Will’s fingers.

“A blessing in disguise.” Alana muttered.

“I thought we were past the use of professional prefixes Mr. Graham.”

“I find that I fall back to the use of verbal shields in times of distress. It is an appropriate way to distance myself from others,” Will’s fingers and by extension his hands, were rough from work beyond that of a teacher and profiler. Perhaps the callouses on his thumbs came from Will’s time before Baltimore, spent in the bayous of Louisiana deep in the motors of old boats. “when sarcasm and reclusive behavior does not suitably fend off well-meaning co workers and psychiatrists.”

His lips were curved to say more when Alana spoke.

“How is Darion?” Her gaze was focused deep in her glass before she looked back to Hannibal. “I don’t think I ever saw him so angry.”

“I think it’s the nature of relationships to want to protect those closest to oneself.” Hannibal replied, taking his eyes from Will whose smile was uncharacteristically sharp behind his glass. “And that seeing them in danger might provoke something horrible within us.”

“Hannibal, I don’t think I’ve ever seen such deep seated rage in someone so young.” She locked him within her sights and set her lips in a stern, red line. No longer was she a trembling shade of her former self. Alana was once again purposely intent on fixing what she saw was wrong with the world, ready adjust it to the standards of blind normalcy. And because she was very much like a dog with a bone, Hannibal began to act. With a great reluctance, he let out a sigh and allowed his face to fill with deep sorrow.

“I - I thought that I might’ve gotten that under control.” He paused and looked away from them. “As you know, Darion came into my care many years ago at a very young age. It was at a time where I found myself wanting a child and a family of my own but my career and self imposed solitude made it difficult. I also found many of those around me unfortunately lacking.”

“Baltimore’s finest ladies weren’t suitable? Shared wealth and pretension weren’t enough to form a connection?” Will twirled the remaining whiskey in his glass. Alana let out a sharp noise of indignation.

“There is no need Alana.” Hannibal said placatingly and then leveled a cool gaze at Will. The other man seemed to shrink into his own skin but not because of Hannibal’s searching eyes. It was not often that he spoke out of aggravation or irritation. “Wealth and the unearned sense of superiority that comes with it are unattractive in a partner one intends to stay with for life. They are two traits that I detest immensely.” He paused to look away and imbibe his own drink. “But my search for a partner came to an end when Darion entered my life. His education and well being became my number one priority. Those who helped to raise him were nannies and tutors whom I found wholly unattractive. There would be no sudden and stellar romance with the help for me.

“As for your question Alana, it was only after a few years in my care that I began to notice his...unusual frustration.” He leant against a desk and clasped his hands together. “Before his first outburst, I found that he would become frustrated or angry when something did not go his way or was increasingly frustrating for him. More so than for the average child. A simple ‘no’ might result in a screaming fit or two aborted attempts at a difficult subject might be the cause for intensely hostile behavior for the rest of the day. And I saw too late that his anger might get out of hand.” He looked down at his hands and then back at them. “I fear that it is an issue of his previous environment.”

“What do you mean by that Hannibal?” Alana was leaning forward in her seat. Eating his story out the palm of his hand.

“Before Darion came to me, he came from an abusive home.” Hannibal glanced at the door leading to his son’s hotel room. “His mother had died some years before and his father had begun to succumb to alcohol. It made him, I heard, angry and violent. From what I was informed he often succumbed to drunken rages that Darion himself barely escaped. He had nightmares for many months and I found him flinching when I reached for him and I could only conclude that it was his father’s fault.”

“You say address him with such violence and disdain.” Alana murmured her dark eyes glittering and an expression flashed quickly across Hannibal's face. He could barely restrain from curling his lip up in an animalistic display of anger and disgust.

“That man only deserved the title because of his blood relation. Nothing else. He was truly the cause of Darions outbursts. Pent up frustration and anger over constant distress and loneliness. It took a very long time to convince him that I would not do the same to him.”

“He hasn't completely left his anger behind though.” Will said into the silence that filled the air. “CHildren like that can become a danger to those around them. Perhaps he might -”

He stopped at the suddenness of Hannibal’s gaze on him. There was something in the other man's eyes that unnerved him ever so slightly, gave him the sense of mild discomfort.

“My son is not a danger Mr. Graham and I think we will leave the conversation at that.”

“I’m sure he doesn't mean anything Hannibal.” Alana said in her most placating voice. Hannibal could feel her alarm. she had never heard or seen him like this, less than the gentlemanly image that he always wore around her.

“I didn't Doctor. Darion is a good boy.” He paused and looked between his glass and Hannibal. “But I’ve seen so many ‘good boys’ do bad things afterwards. The experience of youth is a tumultuous one shaped by the ever present nearly godly presence of their parents but there are always things that can go wrong. There will always be that forbidden Apple and the Snake in the Garden of their childhood that must be resisted. And there are some who cannot find it in themselves to resist despite their heavenly warnings.” Will’s eyes finally landed on Hannibal’s lips and stayed there. “My apologies Hannibal, can we forgo the use of professional prefixes?”

He paused and for a moment seemed to considering the younger man. And then in another the angry creases on his face faded as a slight smile rose to his lips.

“I find that in fall to the use of verbal shields in times of distress Mr. Graham.” Their eyes met for a single explosive moment. “I find that in the presence of insolent patients and beleaguered colleagues they form a decent shield against them. Your rudeness has been forgiven William. I think it time we change our topic of conversation.”

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“I thought she might never leave.” Will puts his glass on the side table with more force than necessary. Hannibal hides his wince with a slight turn of his head towards the window. “More drink may have been necessary to accommodate her presence.”

“That is a surprisingly new development of thought.” Hannibal replied as he poured himself another drink. He had to admit that along with Will, more alcohol had been ingested in Alana’s presence than usual. He eyed Will curiously out the corner of his eye. “Something that I did not think you able or willing to voice.”

“My desire for Alana has waned in the recent months.” Will seemed uncomfortable with the proclamation, his hands clasped in his hands and his head hanging between his shoulders as Hannibal took his seat once more. “I understand now that I am...different. In a gruesome sort of way.”

“And because you find yourself unacceptable to her perceived vision of normalcy and peace you have removed her completely from your roster of potential mates.”

“If that's how you want to put it Hannibal. Not that my roster was particularly lengthy.” Will replied with a depreciating sort grin that crinkled the skin around his eyes. “I think it's more of a defensive measure.”

“Against Alana?” Hannibal asked, restraining the pleasant shiver that sought to make him tremble at the sound of his name in Will's mouth. “I doubt there is anything to fear from our associate.”

“For her Doctor.” He replied and finally looked at Hannibal straight on, for more than a second. “I think I might become a...danger to those around me. My thoughts have never been

tasty and I feel that they may infect the rest of me. Turn me into something to be reviled and then put down by the merciful and all good Jack Crawford." His last words were tinged with something wonderfully acidic.

"I doubt that would ever occur." Hannibal replied looking gently at the other man. "You have more than enough paddles to guide your wayward boat."

Will scoffed at that and looked back into his drink for a long moment. "I think I need only one paddle. Too many might cause me to go more wildly off course than I would by myself."

"Flattery, William, will get you nowhere in life." Hannibal smiled and offered another drink which was politely refused. "But it will grease the wheels of your progress immensely."

"Blunt observations might work better for what I want." He said with a small smile and stood. He wobbled for a moment and his eyes focused on hannibal before he moved to stand over him. Will's form cast Hannibal in the indigo coolness of his shadow. "I think I should do this before my rational mind overcomes the drink.

"And what might that be William?" Hannibal tilted his head as he looked up at the other man. The soft light fluttered through his curls and highlighted the gentle bow of his upper lip as they opened to take in a deep, stabilizing breath.

"I think saw you shiver when I said your name. As if I had breathed on the back of your neck with soft words of midnight passion. I think I saw you do it many times. And it's doing horrible things to my imagination."

Hannibal blinked. "I beg your pardon?" He made a movement to rise from his seat but was stopped by a gentle hand to his shoulder.

"Stay. Please." Will commanded, his voice much softer. His head fell to the side in open curiosity just like one of his many dogs. Hannibal was sure though that the dark intelligent depths of their eyes did not hold the same burning lust that Wills did. His hand instead came to rest on Hannibal's chin, with two fingers on the soft vulnerable underside of his jaw and a

thumb running over Hannibal's lips. “I like it when you're quiet. Or when I can make you quiet.”

“I think that the alcohol has truly gone to your head.” The eye contact, Will’s usually carefully guarded stare was focused entirely on Hannibal and it made him want to turn away. “An error on my part, I apologize.”

“No. Not at all. Well partly.” Will replies and a furrow forms on his forehead as he continues to look down at Hannibal. The derision on his face is beautiful as is the pout that comes with it. “The alcohol is only helping to spur my speech along, loosing the paranoid inhibitions that my mind used to hold my tongue subjugated and in check. If we hadn’t had this little get together, as unfortunate as it is, I don’t think I would’ve been able to do this.” His thumb stroked down Hannibal’s chin. “I think I might’ve continued to wallow in a stinking pit of indecision that would’ve eaten me up until I finally did something drastically...stupid.”

He smiled, something lazy and feral, and it made Hannibal unintentionally warm. But not unpleasantly. “I do think that you must -”

“Shhh.” Will hushed Hannibal and once again pressed his thumb to his lips. “I think I would like to try something tonight.”

Hannibal, keeping silent, arched his eyebrows. ‘What would that be?’ He thought. And Will, as if he had heard his thoughts, began to bend down. As he bent, his hand began to descend, stroking over the underside of his jaw and the column of his neck. When he was face to face with Hannibal, breathing the same air as him, that hand rested on the junction of Hannibal’s shoulder with the thumb resting on his suprasternal notch.

“I would like you to be very very quiet Dr. Lecter.”

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It was only in the early hours of the morning that Hannibal realized that there was something wrong. The warm tendrils of William’s whiskey tinged touch were fading from his limbs. Instead replaced with the cold monotony of a life he was forced into to appeal to those

weaker and more insignificant than himself. With a huff, he left his room to speak with Darion. There was no need to go out into the hall to reach the boys room and no need to knock on the connecting door. So he turned the knob, entered the room and froze as Darion started.

For a long moment they stood on their respective sides of the room saying nothing.

“Is there something wrong dear child?” Hannibal asked as he moved from the door. He could feel the warmth left behind on the knob as he took a delicate sniff of the air. Pine and damp hung heavy in the air. “Something that you feel you must tell me.”

“No father.” Darion mumbled shuffling away from Hannibal’s slow and predatory approach. He was unusually preoccupied with the blank bedding that looked barely disturbed by last night’s rest. “Nothing is troubling me.”

“I do not suffer liars under my care, Darion.” Hannibal responded as he closed in on his son. The boy had pushed himself into a corner that he could not escape unless he bowled Hannibal over. “You know you must tell the truth to me.” He continued as he reached out to the boy.

And Darion flinched.

“I’m sorry.” He murmured, watery eyes finally fluttering up to reach Hannibal's own. He shifted forward at Hannibal’s insistent pull and stopped at half an arm’s distance. “I couldn’t help it.”

“Help what dear boy?” Hannibal inquired as his hand made its way from Darions shoulder to cup his jaw and turn his face to the side. “What could’ve happened?”

Darion swallowed and trembling like a man before the firing squad awaited his fate. Hannibal could feel him tensing beneath his hand and as he leant in to smell Darion, watched the muscles of his neck tighten like chords. “I- I think I might’ve disappointed you.”

“You ungrateful child.” Hannibal snarled and began leaning back. “I have done so much and you throw it away over so little.”

He didn’t feel pity for the tears that were pooling against his fingers. “I’m sorry.”

“Out of my sight.”

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